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# retro GAMER™

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# THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S THE BEST FREE COVER GAME YOU'VE EVER PLAYED?




## DARRAN JONES

The first disc of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* that was given away free with *Official Saturn Magazine*. I knew I needed to own it.

**Expertise:**
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

**Currently playing:**
*Zelda: Skyward Sword*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Strider*




## STUART HUNT

Though I have fonder memories of looking forward to the *Amstrad Action* covertape each month, the best magazine freebie I ever played has to be *Christmas NiGHTS*.

**Expertise:**
Games with flying bits in them

**Currently playing:**
*Assassin's Creed Revelations*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Assassin's Creed Revelations*




## PAUL DAVIES

Mine is *Christmas NiGHTS* that came with the UK official Saturn magazine. That was an incredible freebie!

**Expertise:**
Constantly banging my head against a brick wall

**Currently playing:**
*Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Ghouls 'N Ghosts*




## IAIN LEE

I don't remember ever getting one. The BBC was limited with that sort of stuff. I think once I got a word processor.

**Expertise:**
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live

**Currently playing:**
*Halo: Reach*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Elite* (BBC)




## ASHLEY DAY

*Cyberdyne Warrior* for the C64. It's a genuinely great game that could have been sold as a proper title.

**Expertise:**
The games of Team17, the MSX and Sega's *Shining Force* series

**Currently playing:**
*BurgerTime World Tour*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Shining Force III*




## PAUL DRURY

After a few years out of gaming, I rejoined the fold in 1992 and found *Commodore Format* was giving away classic games. *Ancipital* was on the first one I bought. It felt like coming home.

**Expertise:**
*Quetzalcoatl*

**Currently playing:**
*Professor Layton And The Spectre's Call*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sheep In Space*




## JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

*Official PlayStation Magazine*'s Net Yaroze games. Some were as good as commercial games! *TimeSlip* and *Terra Incognita* are ace!

**Expertise:**
Anything obscure

**Currently playing:**
*El Shaddai: Ascension Of The Metatron*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Star Control II*




## RICHARD BURTON

The *Arkanoid* clone *Batty* given away with *Your Sinclair*. Great power-ups, frantic gameplay and a superb co-operative two-player mode. The best game of its kind on the Spectrum… and it was free!

**Expertise:**
Stuff and nonsense

**Currently playing:**
*Dingo*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Manic Miner*




## MARTYN CARROLL

*Batty* was pretty bloomin' special, but the one I played the most was *Cyclone*, the old Vortex rescue-'em-up that appeared on a *Sinclair User* tape.

**Expertise:**
8-bits and bobs

**Currently playing:**
*Battlefield 3*

**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*

# LOADING...




**One look at our cover, or a glance at the hats on this page, will reveal that the silly season is once again upon us, and you can join in the celebrations with this issue's truly superb content. There's an exclusive interview with *Dragon Quest*'s Yuji Horii, an in-depth feature on *Frogger* to celebrate its 30th birthday, and an overdue look at the many great arcade conversions for Atari's Lynx. The star this month, though, is definitely Martyn Carroll's look at the covertape wars, which dominated the 8-bit magazines during the late Eighties and early Nineties. I have many fond memories of playing *Moley Christmas* during the holiday season, and it's a pity that magazines no longer give away free titles.**

Even though **Retro Gamer** is a magazine that celebrates the past, we like to keep a keen eye on the future, and 2012 is going to be a very good year. *Final Fantasy*, *Street Fighter*, *Metal Gear*, *Mega Man* and *Double Dragon* are all celebrating their 25th anniversaries, while David Crane's *Pitfall!* is 30 years old. Needless to say, the above franchises are already giving us plenty of ideas.

Enjoy the magazine,



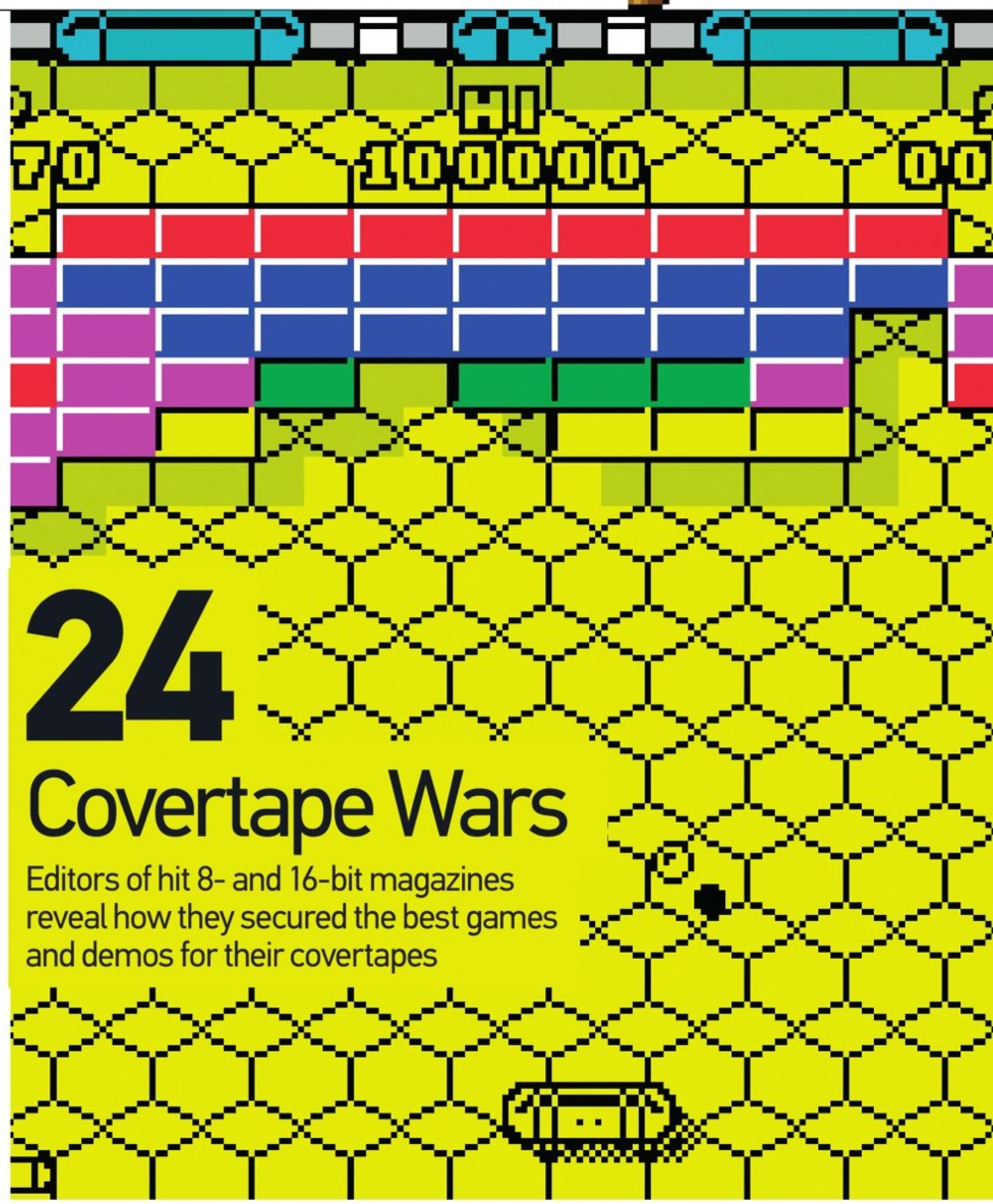
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**>> Load 97** Breathing new life into classic games

## FEATURED








## RETRO REVIVALS



## In the hot seat this month…







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## "As diversely designed as an RPG has ever been" Samuel Roberts













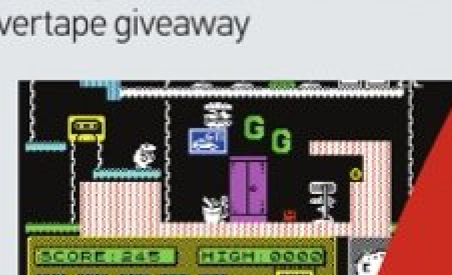


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# ESSENTIALS



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# retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» It's been another busy month, with a lot of our focus being on two big gaming events. GameCity returned with a Zelda theme and stars such as Eric Chahi, while the Replay Expo in Blackpool had a truly successful second year

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» Pinball was well represented, with over 60 tables in total. Expect a feature about their history in a future issue.





# REPLAY IT AGAIN

## BLACKPOOL HOSTS ITS SECOND ANNUAL GAMING EXPO

**The weekend of 5 November saw Blackpool hosting its second annual Replay Expo event, and it was a huge success.**

Once again organised by Gordon Sinclair, Dave Moore and Andy Brown, the first thing that struck you was the sheer scale of the event compared to the previous year. The second was how busy it was, with some 4,000 people visiting the event over the course of the weekend.

Event co-organiser Gordon Sinclair was delighted with the response. "The show was amazing," he began. "Every time we put on one of these events, we are blown away by the support we receive. We still think we can make things even better, though, so we collected feedback from those who attended and are busy working through over 400 responses to make sure Replay 2012 and all of our other events expand in all the right places."

The structure of the event itself was very similar to last year's effort, with newer games like *Rock Band*, *Sonic Generations* and Microsoft's Kinect at the front of the hall, and classic machines everywhere else.

There was plenty to buy this year as well, with numerous stalls selling everything from Jaguar and Atari Lynx games, to new homebrew projects, arcade machines and official *Bubble Bobble* merchandise. It was even possible to buy mouse mats and posters featuring the art of Oliver Frey, who, along with Roger Keane and Bob Wakelin, was also at the event. Oliver, in particular, was impressed by the expo. "Quite apart from the enthusiasm for retro gaming I saw in the crowds of all ages, I was blown over by the amount of former readers of *Crash*, *Zzap!* and *Amtix* I got to meet," he recalled. "Their recollections and compliments were quite moving!"

Jeff Minter, who had his own Llamasoft stall there, was also impressed with the response from fans. "It is really nice to meet people who liked the work we've done over the years and still remember us fondly," he said. "I'll never forget that it's those people who have enabled us to do what we do over the years and have fun doing it, so I will always be happy to meet them and talk games with them or whatever. I'm only happy that people are still pleased to see me after all this time and that they enjoy the new stuff we're making as well as the old games we've done."

Talks were in abundance, with BAFTA presenting 'The Rise & Fall Of Imagine Software' and 'Pages Of History: A Look Back At Newsfield'. **Retro Gamer** regular Paul Drury chaired the Imagine panel, while freelancer Andrew Fisher hosted the Newsfield piece. Both talks were incredibly insightful, with the Imagine one in particular being a highlight due to the involvement of Bruce Everiss, who was one of the directors of the company at the time, and Paul Andersen, who was the producer/director of the famous *Commercial Breaks* documentary.



» Many of the huge screens were set up for multiplayer, making it a great way to meet new friends.

Other talks included Chris Hoyle, a private arcade collector who discussed the culture of Blackpool's once-thriving arcade scene, and Team17's interesting look back at its ever-popular *Worms* franchise, which was delivered by the company's head of design, John Dennis.

For many, though, it was the sheer number of games on offer that was the real draw of Replay 2011, and it certainly didn't disappoint. Everywhere you looked there were great games to play. Arcade games were constantly occupied and ranged from *Operation Wolf* and *Mr Driller* to *Frogger* and *Donkey Kong*. The selection on offer was staggering, and there was a large focus on multiplayer and competitive tournaments, which was also pleasing to see.

The other big draw over both days was the huge collection of pinball tables that were available. Packed down one side of the hall and occupying an additional room, they created an alluring cacophony of pings and speech that made them impossible to ignore, and we were constantly asked about the possibility of giving them more coverage within the magazine.

Charity was also well represented, with the event raising an impressive figure over the two days. "This year the event supported GamesAid, SpecialEffect and Teenage Cancer Trust," explained Gordon. "The final figures are not yet in, but we can say that the total raised is over £4,000! Everyone at Replay would especially like to thank **Retro Gamer** forum member mohicankid and his team for co-ordinating all of the charitable activities and running the hugely popular raffle, tombola and lucky dip. This was the first year that we have run an official after-show party, and James Harkness did a great job organising the entertainment from SID80's and Nintendisco, and the pub quiz, run by Replay crew member Mat Corne. Around 250 people attended and over £1,200 was raised by the party alone."

In fact, the only negative thing we found about the whole event is that it's grown so much that it's now extremely hard to catch up and talk to everyone from the forums. It's a minor quibble to what was an otherwise fantastic weekend, and we can only wonder where Gordon, Dave, Andy and the rest of the talented team of organisers will go from here. *

> **"Some 4,000 people visited the Replay Expo over the course of the weekend"**

## Replay Thoughts

» We spoke to several industry insiders about the weekend



**Steve Lycett, Sumo Digital**

"Really, really, really enjoyed this year's event! More bases than ever were covered – especially if you're a fan of pinball – and the sheer number of excellent trade stands gave my wallet a real beating! Special mention has to go to the miniature *Star Wars* cab, my star of the show, but there were so many to choose from. My only regret is I missed a lot of the talks! I'm really hoping they do it again next year, and it continues to get bigger and better, yet remain as approachable and friendly. Still the best games show in the UK for me."



**John Dennis, Team17**

"I thought the expo was great. It was something of a novelty for me as I've not been before, but the collection of games on show was really impressive. It was a really nice way to spend a Saturday playing games I have very fond memories of from yesteryear. Retro gaming is a great niche for an expo, and with a sprinkling of legends like Jeff Minter and enthusiastic cosplayers, the event had a great mix of history and fun. I was [also] pleasantly surprised at how many people were there to listen to my talk. I hope they found it entertaining and a little insightful about the *Worms* brand."



**Bruce Everiss, ex-Imagine Software**

"The event was amazing; so much interest in old games written for less-powerful platforms. It really shows the enduring value of great gameplay. The barrier of entry to producing 8-bit games was so low that people tried many different things that just couldn't be done on the later consoles. It is only now, with smartphone apps, that developers are again being afforded such a high level of creative freedom. The Imagine talk attracted about 140 people, quite a few of whom videoed it, so it will reach a far larger audience."

## THE RETRO DEBATE

**» What's your favourite part of Replay?**

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

**the_hawk**
It has to be meeting up with fellow forumites. You guys rule!

**Scapegoat**
Being able to tell Jeff Minter in person that his stuff is great gave me a tingle in places where I didn't know I had places.

**r0jaws**
I didn't have time to play any games, but I really enjoyed the social side. Nice to meet a lot of the guys on here. Next year I will definitely get a go on *Smash TV*...

**sscott**
Meeting members. Wish I had played a few more arcade and pinball tables, though!

**merman**
I played more games, particularly pinball, this year than I did last year, but to be honest the reason it's such a great event is a combination of all three: playing, socialising and talking to the people who helped make this industry so great.

**RetroBob**
I can play consoles at home but took the opportunity to get as much pinball and arcade action in as possible while I had the chance! I also particularly enjoyed meeting up with people from different gaming communities, including **RG**.

I'm not historically a pinball guy but I loved the raw mechanical feeling of playing on a real table, as well as the sheer noise and light spectacle. There were so many pins this year too! I think *Firepower II* was my favourite, with all the traditional Williams noises. Also, I was in the same hotel as the Northern Lights crew – really nice guys.

**TwoHeadedBoy**
Only went for the Saturday, so thought I'd sack off the gaming side and just catch up with everyone. Still played a bit of pinball, though. All those flashing lights and whatnot – you can't avoid it, really!

**Gonad**
The announcements: "Could all *Pong*-ers please make their way to the tournament room immediately."

### FORUM OPINION

**What's your favourite part of Replay?**



# retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

**Here's the bio...**
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He used to present the 11 O'Clock Show, but please don't hold that against him. You can find more information about Iain at **www.iainlee.com**




Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits and The 11 O'Clock Show, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro gaming




# We're the kids

**A few months ago I mentioned that I'd shown my nephew *Repton*, expecting it to blow his mind, only for him to look at me with pity.**

I asked you to email in with your experiences of showing old games to the youth of today. The reaction was pretty surprising.

First shock came from a 12-year-old getting in touch, saying HE was a retro head. Euan Black has a console collection that probably puts a lot of yours to shame. I counted 19 consoles in his list, including a Spectrum. It's like me growing up and owning a collection of different hoops from the Second World War, but it has to be saluted.

I had several emails from dads who had taken great delight in showing old games to their offspring. Gareth Qually told me how his five and eight-year-old girls had fallen asleep while a C64 game loaded – something I think we've all done – but said if the game was good they loved it. "I just started playing *Maniac Mansion* with the eldest and wish I had recorded her face when we opened a door into the mansion and we had that lovely 8-bit PC speaker attempt at noise. She genuinely was scared and was then nervous to go into more doors."

There was a recurring theme in your messages: if the game was good, it didn't matter what it looked like. This is exactly what I wanted to hear, and is the true essence of retro gaming, as far as I'm concerned. Alan Stewart told me about his daughter, Ava, who is 7: "I recently bought *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* for the SNES and she just loves it. I've a little cocktail MAME cab and she'll happily sit and play *Rodland*, *Flicky* and other classics."

John Sloan had an interesting take on things. He said that when he opened a Konix Speedking joystick in front of his nephews, they looked at him like he'd "opened a box with a massive turd in it". He makes an interesting point: "Old equipment bad, old games good. A good game is a good game regardless of when it was made."

Not everyone's kids agree, though. When Justin Kyle showed his five-year-old *Jet Set Willy*, he was pretty shocked when the boy said: "That looks pretty crappy, Dad."

But the email that really hit me, and made me realise how lucky I am to have all of this to go through with my little boy, came from Kenny Haslam, who was kind enough to tell me about his son, Finley.

"Just thought I'd write after reading your column in **Retro Gamer** from a few months back about passing on your retro collection to your kids. My son Finley passed away aged two days back in June and I had big plans to pass, and maybe bore him with, my gaming collection.

"Your article made me laugh, and every time I feel down I come back to that article and think on happily how Finley would have taken to my collection and if he would have been a gamer or not!"

Thanks, everyone. Your honesty is appreciated.



Alice, age 6, playing with her dad's Super Nintendo and loving it

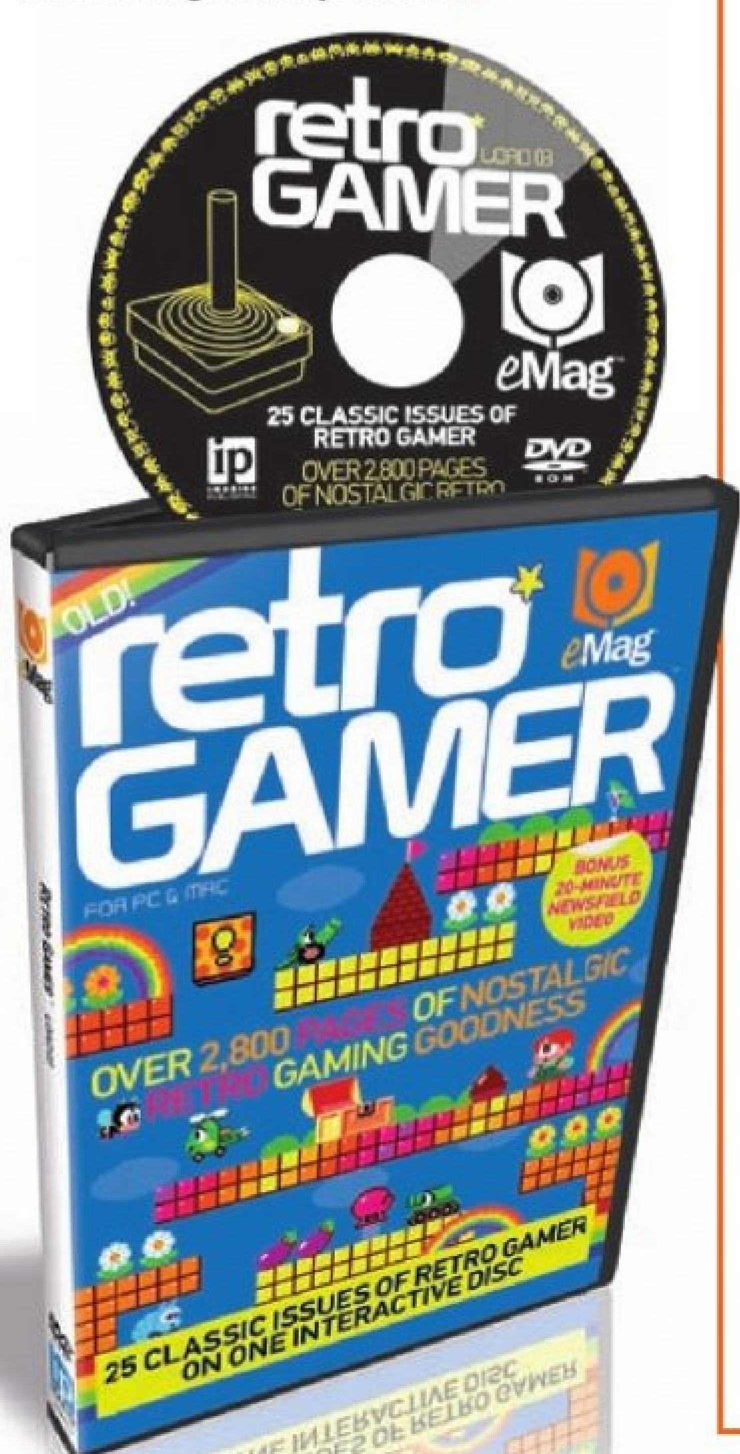
It's like me growing up and owning a collection of different hoops from the Second World War

# THE PERFECT GIFT

## RETRO GAMER ANNOUNCES EMAG LOAD 3

**After months and months of pestering from readers, we're delighted to reveal that our third and latest eMag is now available to buy from our online shop, just in time for the holiday season.**

This latest edition features high-quality PDFs from issues 56 to 80 and covers a diverse range of subjects. Hideo Kojima, John Twiddy, the Oliver twins and Peter Molyneux are just a few of the developers interviewed, while we have making ofs on *Spy Hunter*, *Super Metroid*, *Monkey Island*, *Prince Of Persia* and other huge games and franchises. Priced at £19.99 and featuring 24 back issues that are no longer physically available to buy from our online store, **Retro Gamer** eMag Load 3 is the essential gift. Buy it now from **www.imagineshop.co.uk**




## WHAT'S ON THE DISC?

Your guide to the key features of Load 3




### HOW TO USE THE DISC

Head here for detailed instructions about accessing various parts of the disc. Everything is laid out in three easy steps, making it easy to dive in and enjoy the content.



### BROWSE THE ISSUES

You'll discover all 25 issues of the magazine here, from 56 to issue 80. Simply click on an issue to view and access its entire contents.



### QUICK SEARCH

If you're more interested in looking for specific articles, then this is where you should head. A simple interface makes it easy to find all our superb features.



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Quick Search not doing it for you? Then use the Advanced Search. Simply type in the word you're looking for and Load 3 does the rest.




### BONUS CONTENT

Fans of *Crash*, *Zzap!64* and *Amtix* will be pleased to hear that we're including Gracious Films' excellent documentary, *The Newsfield Years*, on the disc.

## MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



### >> GTA V announced

Rockstar Games has announced its fifth instalment of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, and, predictably, the internet went mental. Set in Los Santos, it looks set to offer all the thrills and spills that have made the series so popular for the past 14 years and, some think, hints at the possible return of *Vice City*'s Tommy Vercetti. More news as and when it appears.



### >> Evil rises

Capcom has revealed that it is intending to re-release its popular Wii lightgun shooters for the PlayStation 3. The *Resident Evil Chronicles Selection* will feature both *The Umbrella Chronicles* and *The Darkside Chronicles*, and will be released in 2012. No news on extras, but we're positively itching to play through them again.



### >> Undefeated

*Under Defeat*, one of the Dreamcast's last games, is heading to Xbox Live Arcade and PSN. Developer G-Rev has revealed that it will feature a high-definition makeover, and a new widescreen remixed game mode. Interestingly, it's also receiving a retail release, making it uncertain who, if anyone, will pick it up for Western distribution. Fingers crossed it's Rising Star Games.

# retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

**Here's my bio…**
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.




Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years




# Freebie Jeebies

**What do a bag of Monster Munch, a can of Pepsi, VHS tape and Game Boy keyring clock all have in common?** We were all very proud working on the official Nintendo magazine in 1992. If sales dipped below 100,000 per month it would be cause for concern. Every month the Big Boss would call us into a company-wide meeting to show us graphs and send us off to the pub for free beer. I guess it's time to realise that it wasn't the trailblazing 91 per cent review for *Kirby's Dreamland* keeping folks satisfied.

Around ten years back a friend once joked how he'd bought such a crumby games magazine that he regretted not choosing an armful of snacks instead. A few years before that he needn't have worried – a games mag way back when came bagged with a ton of stuff worth more than the tome itself.

From what Stuart tells me, this month's **RG** is going into a lot of detail about covermounts, as they are called. Not just jewel-cased demo discs, but all the way back to when home computers used tape decks to load software; when a C30 cassette for pirated games made teenagers drool. This is also when a floppy disc was a flimsy 7-inch vinyl, possibly transparent but almost certainly brightly coloured, and not yet something associated with data storage. Not that this stopped magazines cutting the screeches and whistles of machine code and encouraging readers to connect their computers to Dad's 1970s radiogram (a combined radio and record player made to look like a piece of furniture).

Did anyone even read *Nintendo Magazine System* in 1992? Or was it just an ugly peel, as Penny Arcade once referred to the US *Official Xbox Magazine*, to be thrown away after rescuing the good stuff? After losing out on the official PlayStation license, this is how EMAP made itself feel better about Future Publishing's efforts shifting five times more copies than *PlayStation Plus*. No disc. No dice.

I think it was a around this time that games journalists at EMAP hit upon the concept of **discerning readers. In other words, these were the 30 per cent (give or take) of the audience that bought a magazine to enjoy reading about games. Retro Gamer, as a great example,** doesn't need covermounted gifts to be a prize in itself. And I've just realised what I wanted to say this month, so here it is.

**RG** readers are the kind of people we always wanted to inspire working on the old games magazines. We weren't trying to fool anyone, even if the outside package conveyed otherwise. Whenever we had meetings to decide what could be done next that would be better than what we had done before, the editorial team always **wanted more pages, better paper, cooler covers,** reader-oriented stuff. We were (right or wrong), really proud of all our hard work based on the love behind it all. So, for the record, we really cared about the free magazine that came with the PlayStation showreel VHS and spicy crisps. We cared more about what was going into your heart than into your stomach.

Would be cool if **RG** came with a free 'Texan' and bottle of 'Corona' though – that's the soft drink by the way, not the booze. Retro cover mounts!

Retro Gamer readers are the kind of people we always wanted to inspire working on the old games magazines

# GAME ON

## DAVID CROOKES REPORTS ON THIS YEAR'S GAME CITY EVENT



» Richard Lemarchand, a games developer for around 20 years, discusses his career.



**It was the queues that proved most astonishing. While GameCity, the annual event which has taken over Nottingham for the past six years, has proved enduringly popular (last year it attracted a record 45,000 people and this year was all set to break that), it has never before seen the incredible number of people who turned up to visit the huge tent erected in the city centre square.**

They began to arrive early on the final morning of this four-day celebration, eager to experience the intriguing *Legend Of Zelda* event. By 10am, when the doors opened, there was a queue of 200 people and, throughout the day, as more and more people turned up, that queue never seemed to diminish. Their aim? To see the city's Old Market Square transformed into a Hyrulean market.

The emphasis was less on *Skyward Sword*, the latest Wii game, and much more on previous entries. The earlier *Zelda* games were available to play, and it was wonderful to see young children sitting on beanbags enjoying the relatively primitive pixel-perfect titles of old and become as hooked as a whole generation had done before them.

With green suits on sale and an area in which people could decorate shields or learn how to sword fight, it was worth the wait. And it was interesting to note that just across the way, outside the rather horrendously named Council House – Nottingham's town hall – was another queue that was equally as long, made of people braving the cold for a chance to hear Richard Lemarchand, lead designer of *Uncharted 3*, discuss a career that spans back to 1993 when he worked on the Sega Mega Drive game *TinHead*. GameCity was rapidly winning friends.

Lemarchand – who said his earliest gaming memory was playing *Galaxian* – was an ever-present feature of GameCity this time around. As well as giving talks to promote Naughty Dog's most successful games, he was on hand to introduce other game designers too, among them *Another World* creator Eric Chahi, who had dyed his hair blue for the occasion.

Chahi took over the entire first full day – the Wednesday – not only showing off his new game *From Dust* but also giving a complete director's commentary of *Another World*, which he played in full while people munched on an assortment of food. Retro certainly had its place: at the Homemade Cafe on the Friday night, people could play on old consoles while eating and drinking; during the day visitors were able to enjoy a one-man performance by Pat Ashe centered around *Tetris*.

The National Museum of Computing celebrated the 25th year of the Domesday project and the 30th anniversary of the BBC Micro system and people were able to try their hand at BASIC programming. "We had a great reaction with people programming or playing games such as *Elite*," says Andrew Armstrong, who volunteers for the museum. "We even had a pair of people programming a Nyan Cat program on the Beebs."

It all went down very well with organiser Iain Simons. "GameCity isn't especially concerned with the playing of games; it's about the life of games – that's why heritage is so important to us," he said. "The Wednesday event curated by Eric Chahi was amazing, and encapsulated a lot about what we're trying to achieve. To have a developer spend a lot of time at the festival, and really unpack for the audience all of the influences and interests that inform their work, was a real privilege for us with the whole event. He even collaborated with a chef to produce an experimental meal. I think it felt like a complete, rounded single event for the first time." *



» The *Zelda* fun gets underway during the sixth annual gaming festival in Nottingham.


## RETRO GAMER BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD

If you have an iPhone or iPad, you'll be delighted to hear that every single back issue of **Retro Gamer** is now available for download. This is a great opportunity to view the evolution of the magazine, and also get your hands on the fabled first issue, as it remains extremely hard to get hold of. Back issues are available now at just £2.99 each. Head to http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/retro-gamer/id471305650?mt=8 to download your **RG** library immediately.




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### games™



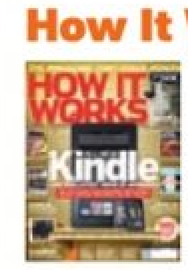

This month's issue of **games™** takes an in-depth look at the remastering process behind games like *Ico*, *God Of War* and *Metal Gear Solid Collection*, along with a celebration of *Metroid*. It's also jam-packed with all the big Christmas games, including *Uncharted 3*, *Batman: Arkham City* and *Skyrim*. Don't miss it.

### Apps Magazine




Issue 14 of **Apps** is a special Awards Issue, which sees us handing out gongs for the best apps and games of 2011. Elsewhere in the issue, *Scribblenauts* lands on iOS with a truly massive bang, we pit the iPhone and iPad against the Nintendo DS, and we discover a brand new game that might just be better than *Infinity Blade*.

### How It Works




This month, **How It Works** takes an in-depth look at Amazon's new Kindle Fire, a new eReader/tablet hybrid that is changing the way people consume digital content. The issue also comes packed with a whole host of awesome articles on everything from DNA, through supernovas, to how Porsche's new 911 was designed and built.

# THE VAULT

## TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



### Bubble Bobble Badges

■ **RRP:** £0.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.1up2p.com

When we visited Replay, we were totally blown away by these gorgeous badges. Officially licensed from Taito, they feature Bub and Bob and plenty of other popular characters from both *Bubble Bobble* and its equally great sequel, *Rainbow Islands*. The stroke of brilliance here, though, is that 1UP2P has also made T-shirts of the first stage, so that you can move the badges around to your heart's content and create your own classic scenes from the game. Sheer genius.

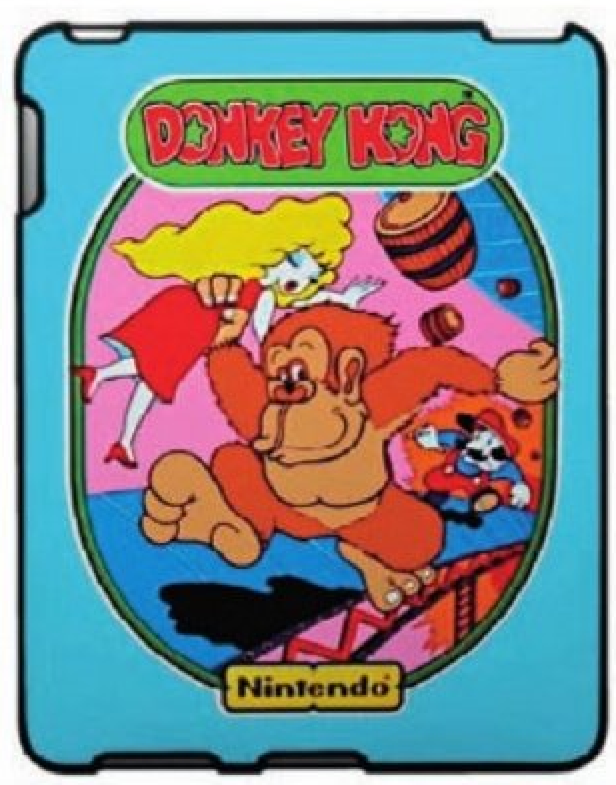
### Sonic blue flex cap

■ **RRP:** $19.99 (approx £12.40)

■ **Buy it from:** www.bigbadtoystore.com

Some would argue that at some point in life you reach an age where you must put away childish things – things such as Mario suits, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* make-up and Sonic caps. We don't prescribe to this sensibility at all, and would confidently walk through any UK high street wearing blue overalls, olive Blanka mascara and a Sonic cap. Anyway, Sonic caps: yours for around £12 each.






### Donkey Kong iPad case

■ **RRP:** £34.95

■ **Buy it from:** www.zazzle.co.uk

Had Mario owned an iPad back in 1981 he most likely would have been able to download a handy app for it that would have solved his sticky mad ape predicament. Maybe an app that sent a signal directly into DK's brain that softened his temperament or just killed him outright, or perhaps an app that provided him with a telephone number for the National Guard. What caused us think up this ludicrous scenario? Why, this *Donkey Kong* iPad case, of course.



### Mega Man energy drink

■ **RRP:** $2.99 each (approx £1.85)

■ **Buy it from:** www.bigbadtoystore.com

We honestly don't know if Mega Man likes energy drinks or not. We know for a fact he likes energy, so with that in mind we guess it would make sense for them to be his drink of choice. This is, unfortunately, the only findings from our extensive research into Mega Man's diet. Anyway, if you're someone who likes your drink and consumables to be endorsed by gaming characters who don't consume the product being endorsed, then pay a visit to Big Bad Toy Store next time you do a food shop.




### Club Nintendo Badge Collection

■ **RRP:** £29.99

■ **Buy it from:** www.genkivideogames.com

Nintendo often treats its Nintendo Club of Japan members to exclusive merchandise and collectables, and these badges here were exclusively distributed to Nintendo Platinum Club Members during *Mario*'s 25th anniversary celebrations. They can now be yours by giving £29.99 to Genki Video Games. Each badge is decorated with a picture of a classic *Mario* character, and all boxes even combine to make a picture of Mario.

# Welcome back to the golden age




## RETRO COLLECTIONS

Revisit the games, films, shows and hardware that defined entertainment for a generation

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## * A MOMENT WITH...

# Rawson Stovall

In this month's "A Moment With...", gaming icon Rawson Stovall shares his memories from his time as the famous 'Vid Kid'.

### Who is Rawson Stovall?

Rawson was the kid-friendly face of Eighties game journalism. At its zenith, his pioneering Video Beat column was syndicated in newspapers across the US. Today, Rawson is a producer for Electronic Arts, working on titles such as *The Godfather* and *The Sims*.

**Do people remember you as Vid Kid?**
Sometimes people do, especially people who are still in the game industry. I ran into the legendary David Crane at an event at Stanford University and when he remembered me it just made my day.

**If/when you are remembered, do people cite you as an inspiration for becoming a game reviewer/journalist?**
I mainly meet people who work in production. Usually they don't know and I don't bring it up. At some point, though, it eventually comes out, including the old pictures. If someone does remember me they often tell me that what inspired them was seeing a kid go out and do something – which meant that they could go out and accomplish something as a kid as well, that age alone shouldn't be a barrier to entry.

**Do you still have the Vid Kid suits and/or briefcase?**
I still have the briefcase. I couldn't give that up. And I still have a tiny Members' Only jacket covered with Activision 'high score' patches for games for the Atari 2600.

**What was the impetus for making the switch from writing about videogames to developing them?**
I wrote my videogame column every week for ten years, from age 10 to age 20, covering the era from the Atari 2600 to the SNES. I was honestly just ready for a change and I was young enough, and fresh out of college, and had moved to California from a small town in Texas, so it was the ideal time to try something new.

**What is it like working on a franchise as well-known as *The Sims*?**
The best thing about working at the *Sims* Studio is working with the people that are overall responsible for it. You can't have one of the most popular and long-lasting franchises in history without having some of the most talented, creative, and fun people in the business. Plus, it's great to work on games that have such a wide and dedicated fan base.

**What do you think is the biggest difference between the games of today from those of yesteryear?**
Almost all games of yesteryear were ultimately designed to beat you, the player. Almost no one would actually finish those games; excelling at videogames was primarily only about high scores or how far you got; the game itself was only a medium or an arena in which you really competed with yourself. Now, most games are specifically designed to be beaten. Hurdles, obstacles, puzzles, power-ups, et cetera, are all very purposely placed to make the game winnable yet make you feel like you are very special because you beat it. I think there's some kind of analogy for life there somewhere…



» [PC] *The Sims* remains massively popular with gamers everywhere.

> "Almost all games of yesteryear were ultimately designed to beat the player"



**What is your fondest memory from your time as the 'Vid Kid'?**
I got to meet a lot of cool people, from game designers to industry legends like Nolan Bushnell and even Eighties icons like Mr. T and Andre the Giant. I also got to introduce the original NES at its US unveiling in 1985.

**What were your favorite games of your Vid Kid era? And of today?**
I never really had a specific favorite game from the Vid Kid era, but I do have a level of affinity for games like *QiX*, *Dig Dug*, *Pac-Man*, *Demon Attack*, *Centipede*, *Kaboom!*, *Cosmic Ark*, *Joust* – action games that couldn't ever really be beaten (unless you were insane). As for now, I think a team of ninjas might apparate in my living room and kill me if I didn't say that I was playing a lot of *Sims Social* on Facebook lately! *






# retrodiary

## 9 December – 5 January

**>> A month of retro events both past and present**



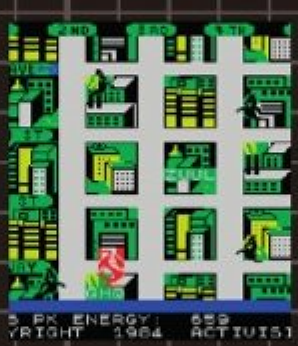
**9 December 1983**
■ According to Sinclair, the 1 millionth ZX Spectrum is manufactured. That's a lot of rubber…



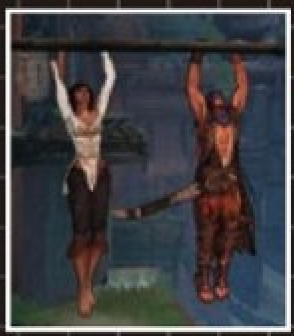

**9 December 1994**
■ It's time for a spot of 3D fisticuffs with the arcade release of *Tekken*.



**9 December 2000**
■ Bandai releases the WonderSwan Color in Japan.



**10 December 1984**
■ Activision produces *Ghostbusters*. The Spectrum version appears in time for Christmas.



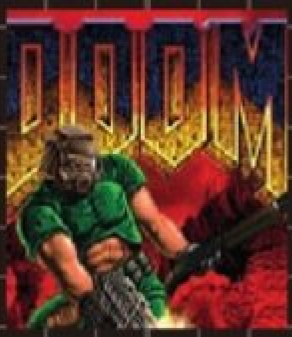
**12 December 2008**
■ *Prince Of Persia* is released by Ubisoft on the PC in Europe and the UK.



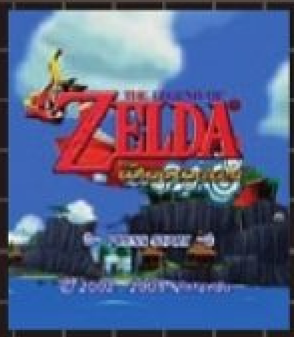

**12 December 2003**
■ *Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator* is released exclusively on the Game Boy Advance.



**12 December 1986**
■ Namco/Atari release the classic coin-op *Rolling Thunder*. Albatross is your character and no, you don't get wafers…



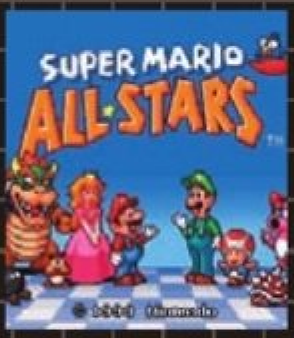

**10 December 1993**
■ A landmark moment arrives with the worldwide release of *Doom*. First-person shooters finally come of age…




**13 December 2002**
■ *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* is released on the GameCube initially in Japan. Europe got it six months later.



**15 December 2006**
■ *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is released on the GameCube, hitting UK shores just in time for Christmas.




**16 December 1993**
■ The awesome *Super Mario All-Stars* is released on the Super Nintendo in the UK.



**17 December 1988**
■ *Final Fantasy II* makes its worldwide debut in Japan on the NES/Famicom.



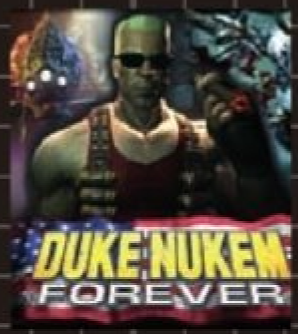
**23 December 1994**
■ The rather swanky NEC PC-FX, NEC's follow-up to the popular PC Engine, is released only in Japan.



**21 December 1994**
■ The creator of *Halo*, Bungie, releases *Marathon* on the Mac, one of the first first-person shooters on the system.



**20 December 2011**
■ *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, an MMORPG for the PC, is due for release in the US and Europe.




**19 December 2007**
■ 3D Realms releases a teaser trailer for *Duke Nukem Forever*. It was announced in 1996 and finally released in 2011.



**31 December 2001**
■ Jeremy 'Jez' San, founder of Argonaut, becomes the first person to receive an OBE for services to the games industry.




**1 January 2004**
■ It's quarterly, it's a magazine from Live Publishing, and it's about games that are retro. **Retro Gamer** issue 1 is released.



**4 January 2001**
■ Take a trip to Gielinor as the first version of *RuneScape*, an MMORPG for the PC, is released to the public.




**5 January 2012**
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets

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# BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

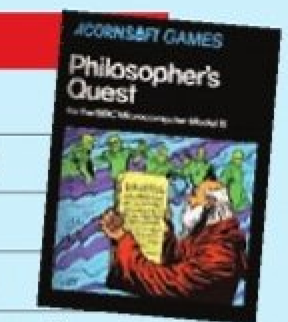


## CHARTS

### OCTOBER 1982

**BBC B**

1 Space Warp (Bug-Byte)
2 Philosopher's Quest (Acornsoft)
3 Backgammon (Bug-Byte)
4 Mutant Invaders (IJK Software)
5 Great Britain Limited (Simon Hessel)




» [Spectrum] *Cosmos* was the first step on the road to great things from Costa Panayi.






# THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1982

**OCTOBER 1982 – TI cuts, Sord hanging over your head, alas poor Oric, Camputers attempts the Lynx effect, Atari attacks Demon Attack, Acornsoft goes arcade mad and Parker feels the Force. Obi-Wan Burtoni thinks these are the games you're looking for…**

**In an attempt to coax prospective home computer purchasers to part with their cash for one of its TI99/4A micros, Texas Instruments launched a £50 cash refund deal to those who bought one before Christmas at the retail price of £199. The overpriced system with the limp offer wasn't attractive to anyone.**

In fact, things were to get a lot more crowded in the home micro market with news that several new systems were impending. Tangerine Computer Systems hoped that its new Oric-1 machine, available in both 16K and 48K flavours, would be in shops by November, priced at £99 and £169 respectively.

Also promising a UK November launch date was Sord Computer Corporation and its Sord M5 micro. Having already been released in Japan and proving to be fairly popular, Computer Games Limited (CGL) took on the distribution of the Sord in the UK. The price was set at £150, but it barely made any impact.

One further micro trying to elbow its way into the frame was Camputers' new machine, the Lynx. It would have 48K RAM, 16K ROM, a Z80A processor and a typewriter keyboard. It would also have a minuscule software base and an even smaller following. It was to be released by the end of the month at around £249.

The Sinclair Spectrum saw some interesting new titles released for it this month. Small software house Abbex Electronics had two titles ready for release: a bog-standard *Pac-Man* clone called *Spookyman* and a shoot-'em-up going by the name *Cosmos*.

While these two titles were nothing to write home about, they did give two future programming stars their first foothold in the Spectrum software scene. *Spookyman* was written by David M Webb, who later went on to code the space puzzler *Starion* for Melbourne House, and *Cosmos* was written by Costa Panayi, who created such Spectrum favourites as *Android One* and *Two*, *TLL*, *Cyclone* and *Highway Encounter* under his own label, Vortex Software.




» [BBC Micro] In fairness, *Snapper* does look more than a little bit like *Pac-Man*.

Llamasoft was becoming more and more prolific in its releases, with several new games made available recently. For the Spectrum there was the shoot-'em-up *Rox III*, the arcade game *Super Deflex*, and a remake of a classic: the simplistic but entertaining *City Bomber*.

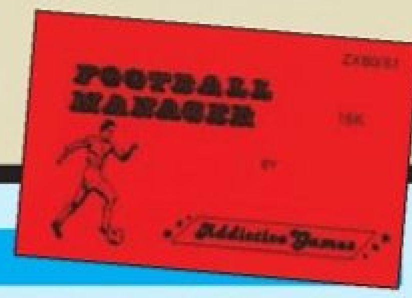
VIC-20 owners had their own version of *City Bomber* entitled *Blitzkrieg*, and the original arcade game, *Traxx*. It sold well and a year later a Spectrum version was released by Quicksilva, with development under the watchful yet hairy gaze of Llamasoft head honcho Jeff Minter.

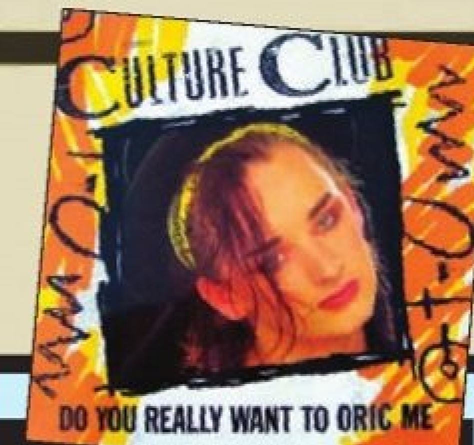
Another month and another lawsuit brewing… Imagic had just released its new game, *Demon Attack*, on the Atari 2600 in the UK. The *Phoenix*-styled game, developed by former Atari programmer Rob



» The Sord M5 was big in Japan but couldn't do much in the crowded UK micro market.




**COLECOVISION**

1. Space Panic (Coleco)
2. Lady Bug (Coleco)
3. Zaxxon (Coleco)
4. Smurf: Rescue In Gargamel's Castle (Coleco)
5. Cosmic Avenger (Coleco)

**ZX81**

1. Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2. Trader (Pixel Productions)
3. 3D Monster Maze (JK Greye Software)
4. Space Intruders (Quicksilva)
5. Volcanic Dungeon (Carnell Software)

**MUSIC**

1. Do You Really Want To Hurt Me (Culture Club)
2. Pass The Dutchie (Musical Youth)
3. Zoom (Fat Larry's Band)
4. Starmaker (Kids From 'Fame')
5. Hard To Say I'm Sorry (Chicago)

## OCTOBER 1982 NEWS

29 October saw Linda Chamberlain found guilty of murdering her nine-week-old baby daughter, Azaria. Mrs Chamberlain and her husband had been camping at Ayers Rock in Australia in 1980 when, they claimed, a dingo came into their camp and took the baby.

Azaria was never found but her bloodstained clothes were and became central to the prosecution. Mrs Chamberlain was duly tried and found guilty.

Four years later, a jacket worn by the baby was found partially buried deep in a dingo's lair. It confirmed the Chamberlains' story, and Linda was released shortly afterwards.

In 1988 the story was made into a Hollywood movie, *A Cry In The Dark*, starring Meryl Streep and Sam Neill.



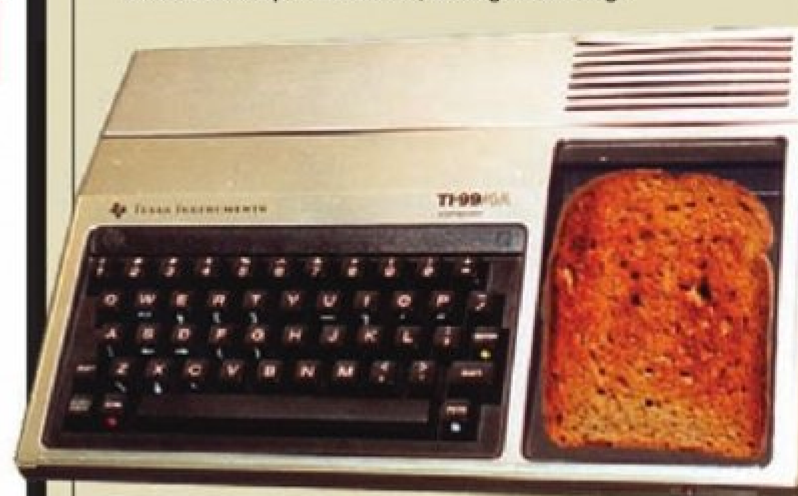

» *Tron*'s pioneering effects work and iconic action sequences earned it cult status and a 2010 sequel.

On 11 October the Mary Rose, flagship of Henry VIII, was raised from the bottom of the Solent. Built in 1510, the 437-year-old ship was sunk in 1545 with the loss of her 500 crew. It had been on its way to fight the French fleet in Portsmouth Sound.

There was good news for moviegoers, with 21 October bringing the UK release of Disney's *Tron*, starring Jeff Bridges complete with light cycles and discs of death.

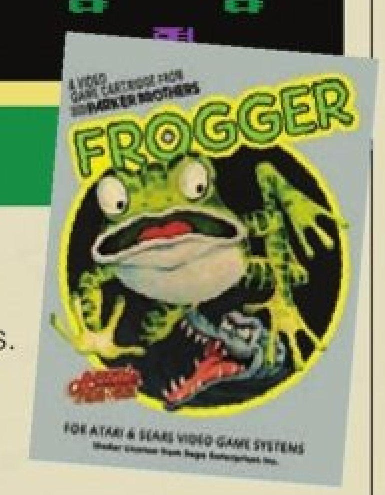
22 October saw the world premiere of *First Blood*, starring Sylvester Stallone. The original ending intended Rambo to commit suicide, as in the book, but this was deemed too depressing by test audiences and was altered. Three more *Rambo* movies followed… Ker-ching!

» The hot panel above the power circuitry on the TI-99/4A could be used to keep drinks warm, among other things.



» [Atari 2600] Parker Brothers' *Frogger* conversion was a hit, commercially and critically.






Fulop, who also coded the classic *Missile Command*, sold very well and became Imagic's bestselling cartridge game.

*Demon Attack* was an excellent game on the Atari system, and while it continued to sell well on both sides of the Atlantic, Atari pressed forward with its claim of breach of copyright and sued Imagic. Both companies agreed to settle out of court, and *Demon Attack* went on to sell over 1 million copies.

Although not as dramatic, there were two new 2600 releases from Parker Brothers. The first was based on the *Star Wars* sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*. It focused on the Hoth battle section of the movie, where Snowspeeders take on the Imperial AT-AT walkers.

Parker Brothers' second game was a much simpler affair: *Frogger*. Guide your frog across the busy road and over the logs to the safety of one of the empty bays at the top of the screen. Once the five bays were filled, it was on to the next but slightly more dastardly stage. It was another polished conversion and again, sold well.

After having some early commercial success with its utility and educational software titles, Hewson Consultants ventured deeper into ZX81 arcade gaming territory with two new releases on the system: *Puckman* and *Pilot*.

*Puckman* was yet another *Pac-Man* clone, albeit one of the better ones. Given the limitations of the ZX81, it played rather well. *Pilot*, on the other hand, was an ambitious but ultimately awful flight simulation. Written in BASIC and attempting to compete with Psion's recently released *Flight Simulation*, it suffered from the unforgivable ailment of keyboard lag. It would take a couple of seconds from pressing the controls on the keyboard to the result appearing on screen.

Being a flight simulation, this frequently meant you were trying to correct your overcorrections, eventually nose diving into the ground and/or punching and killing your ZX81. Hewson promised updated versions of both games for the ZX Spectrum…

There was some arcade joy for BBC Micro owners, with Acornsoft belatedly getting in on the tidal wave of arcade clones. Despite a rich vein of educational gaming titles, there weren't too many top-drawer arcade conversions available for the BBC. Thankfully, the release of *Monsters*, *Defender* and *Snapper* changed that.

*Snapper* was an excellent *Pac-Man* copy. In fact, it was so good that Namco instructed Acornsoft to change it under threat of legal action. So *Pac-Man* magically changed into a character in a cowboy hat, with the ghosts morphing into little monsters with arms and legs. Despite the graphical changes, it was the best of its kind on the BBC.

Also superb was *Monsters*, a *Space Panic*-styled game that sees you dig holes for the aliens to fall in before you slam them on the head with your spade to remove them from the game. Great graphics and animation for the time made these Acornsoft titles must-haves, even if they were overpriced at £9.95 each.

## THIS MONTH IN…

### YOUR COMPUTER



*YC* interviewed Douglas Adams, writer of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, and touched upon the titular handheld electronic book that can hold millions of pages of information. "It's a matter of time before science fiction becomes science fact." Did he own shares in Apple?




### POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY



*PCW* reviewed the Timex Sinclair 1000, a ZX81 clone for the US market. Touted as the first computer under $100, it was the same as the ZX81 bar some extra shielding to stop radio interference and doubling the RAM to 2K. It sold 500,000 units in six months.




### COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



*C&VG* featured a guide to the TI99/4A. It dealt mainly with expansions and TI BASIC, presumably because of a lack of games. The system was popular in the US, although Texas controlled software production, resulting in a smaller library.



# BACK TO THE NINETIES



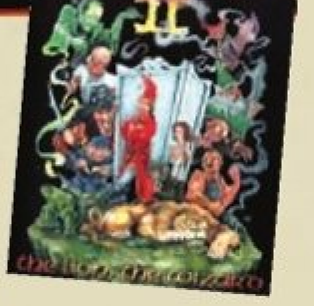
» [32X] Sega's hardware expansion boasted an excellent port of *Mortal Kombat II*. So did the Mega Drive, though…

» [PC] As we all know, the quality and popularity of 'multimedia' games like *Plumbers Don't Wear Ties* led to a change in the industry, and they dominate the market today.




» [PC] The wonderful *Simon The Sorcerer II* is still a classic and even works on modern systems through ScummVM.








**AUGUST 1994 – PlayStation is coming, Sega's 32X is here, play Game Boy games on the SNES, Simon The Sorcerer II coming soon and not quite so soon, and Elite III is complete but not very complete. Richard Burton is mostly harmless…**

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1994

**It had been simmering for a while, but finally news concerning Sony's proposed PlayStation console was coming out, and from initial reactions to demonstrations to the gaming press, indications were the PlayStation would be a huge threat to the forthcoming Nintendo 64 console.**

Sony and Nintendo were originally willing bedfellows as far back as 1986, when the first inklings of the PlayStation were spawned with Sony's development of the CD-ROM format. Sony, along with Philips, continued its development, which led to a U-turn when Nintendo chose Philips over Sony and announced it at CES before even Sony knew…

So come December 1994, when the first Sony PlayStation would go on sale in Japan, it would be extremely interesting to see how Nintendo reacted to the newest console threat on the block.

Released in the UK by Nintendo was a nifty add-on that allowed Game Boy games to be played through your SNES. The Super Game Boy would not only play the games but, in several cases, make enhancements to the graphics or sound. So now Game Boy games could be played on a television screen for just one crisp £50 note.

There was more add-on gaming news, with Sega's 32X system due out next month and a newly unveiled list of games that would go on sale on the 32X's release day. The games that Sega was hoping would win you over were *Virtua Fighter*, *Cyber Brawl*, *Star Wars Arcade*, *Doom* and *Virtua Racing Deluxe*, and, on the whole, they were all excellent games to introduce the 32X to the world. A very promising start…

With Acclaim announcing that it was also converting *Mortal Kombat II* to the 32X, that promising start just got better. Unfortunately, that was as good as it got, as there were only about 40 games ever released for the 32X.

PC and Amiga owners were rejoicing with news that David Braben and GameTek would be working together on *Frontier: First Encounters* (essentially *Elite III*). After the hurried release of *Frontier: Elite II*, which led to several bugs remaining in the game, Braben was adamant that the same thing wouldn't occur with *First Encounters*.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what he got. GameTek and Braben were at odds regarding the release date for *First Encounters*, with development lagging and the due date rapidly approaching. Despite the problems of *Frontier: Elite II*, GameTek wanted the game shipped out with several known bugs that hadn't been addressed.

The game was lambasted by magazine reviewers for being bug-riddled, with many thinking the game was incomplete. Braben and GameTek ended up having a protracted lawsuit over the decision to release it early, which Braben eventually won.




» Game Boy games could be coded with special Super Game Boy enhancements.




» [PC] *Frontier: First Encounters* was released too early. Presumably they're balancing it out with *Elite IV*.

## AUGUST 1994 NEWS



» He may be best known as Tarkin from *Star Wars* today, but Cushing's association with Hammer will be long remembered.

26 August saw the world's first battery-operated heart implanted into 62-year-old Arthur Cornhill. It didn't replace the heart but acted as the left ventricle by pumping the blood. The £40,000 implant was only temporary until a donor heart could be found.

Mr Cornhill had only months to live but agreed to be a test patient for the new procedure. Sadly, he died nine months later of kidney failure…

29 August brought a change in the UK's Sunday trading law, meaning that shops could legally open within designated time scales on a Sunday. Up until this point only certain retail premises were legally allowed to be open: family-run corner shops, garden centres and chemists. Under the new rules, large shops are allowed eight hours of trading while small shops can set their own timetable.

On 19 August, the UK premiere of *The Mask*, starring Jim Carrey and Cameron Diaz, took place. Bank clerk Stanley Ipkiss finds the mask of Loki, the Norse god of mischief, and tries it on for size, being suddenly transformed from a nice guy into madcap, cartoony, green-faced loon the Mask.

11 August saw the death of actor Peter Cushing. Whether you prefer to remember him as Professor Van Helsing, Sherlock Holmes, Grand Moff Tarkin, Baron Frankenstein or Doctor Who, Peter Cushing was regarded as one of Britain's finest and best-loved actors. He died of prostate cancer at the age of 81.

US Gold announced that it had set up a new division called Silicon Dreams, its own development company, after the bombshell that it would no longer be developing for SSI, NovaLogic and the mighty LucasArts. US Gold appeared to be very upbeat regarding the loss of such big contracts, distracting with more news that it was in the process of making its first Amiga CD32 game, *World Cup Golf*.

With previews showing beautiful digitised courses, things were looking good. Of course, the recent bankruptcy of Commodore combined with the discontinuation of the Amiga CD32 meant only one thing: it never made it to release. The PC version was completed, though, and was well received.

Adventure Soft revealed that the sequel to its fantastically bonkers point-and-click adventure, *Simon The Sorcerer*, was almost ready. Titled *Simon The Sorcerer II: The Lion, The Wizard And The Wardrobe*, it was another foray into a parody-encrusted world of all things fairytale, magic and folklore, mashed up with references to *Back To The Future*, *Doctor Who* and *Monkey Island*, among others…

Simon has grown up from the young wizard of the first game into a pubescent pain-in-the-arse wizard, resulting in a tetchy teen with an acerbic line in conversation. Despite this, he must once again do battle with the evil wizard, Sordid.

*Simon II* was everything you would want from a sequel; it had fantastic graphics, top-drawer music, and the voice acting was spot-on… except for Simon himself, who sounded a bit too adult. Even so, *Simon II* was magnificent on both PC and Amiga.

It was released on the PC within months and on the Amiga just five short years later. The reason? Adventure Soft never released it, possibly due to the Commodore world being in turmoil and consoles muscling in. It was left to Epic Marketing to take over the publishing rights, finally getting onto the Amiga in early 2000. Good thing too.

*Super Play* cogitated over the latest crop of SNES games and decided that *Wild Trax* (Nintendo), *World Heroes 2* (Takara), *Muscle Bomber* (Capcom), *NHL '94* (Electronic Arts) and *Fighter's History* (Data East) were the top dogs this month.

*PC Gamer* had a varied platter of gaming titbits to scoff down. *The Chaos Engine* (Renegade), *The Settlers* (Blue Byte), *Cool Spot* (Virgin), *Theme Park* (Electronic Arts/Bulldog), *Al-Qadim: The Genie's Curse* (US Gold), *Pinball Dreams* (21st Century), *The Horde* (US Gold), *1942: Pacific Air War* (MicroProse) and *Simon The Sorcerer* (Adventure Soft) were deemed the best.

A small acknowledgment must also be made to the thoroughly atrocious PC game *Plumbers Don't Wear Ties* by Unica. It was essentially a photo love story in which you did virtually nothing but indicate the next action. *PC Gamer* gave it a highly impressive score of 3%. This game was so bad that gamers voluntarily removed their own eyes and ate them to make it go away…




» The hype machine on Sony's PlayStation was starting up. It would never beat the entrenched Nintendo and Sega, right?

## THIS MONTH IN…

### THE ONE AMIGA




*The One* ran an interview with Vulcan Software, the developer of *Valhalla And The Lord Of Infinity*. When released, opinion was massively split on *Valhalla*. Some Amiga magazines gave 90% or higher scores, while others gave under 20%. It was a pure Marmite game…



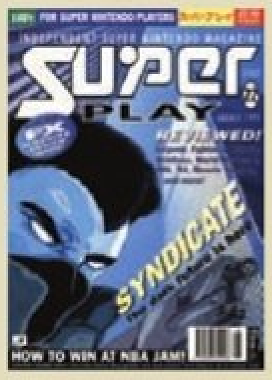

### AMIGA POWER




*AP* had a thorough update on Sensible Software's *Cannon Fodder 2* project. It was more of the same, with your team of soldiers battling through levels, except time travel gets involved, giving a greater variety of level design including space, alien planets and medieval scenarios. It was still a cracking game.




### SUPER PLAY




*Super Play* spoke to the people at Datel about their bestselling Action Replay. The device would change the code of a game to increase lives and power. It was a very lucrative market, as Datel had brought out versions for virtually every popular console.



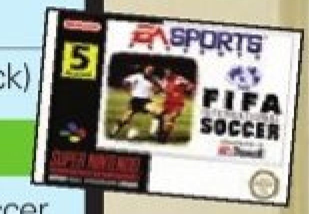

## CHARTS

### AUGUST 1994



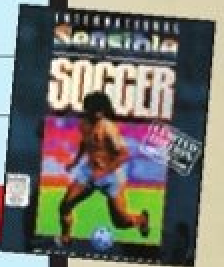

**MUSIC**

1 Love Is All Around (Wet Wet Wet)
2 Crazy For You (Let Loose)
3 Compliments On Your Kiss (Red Dragon With Brian & Tony Gold)
4 I Swear (All-4-One)
5 Searching (China Black)




**SNES**

1 FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
2 World Cup Striker (Elite)
3 Rock 'N' Roll Racing (Interplay)
4 NBA Jam (Acclaim)
5 Clay Fighter (Acclaim)

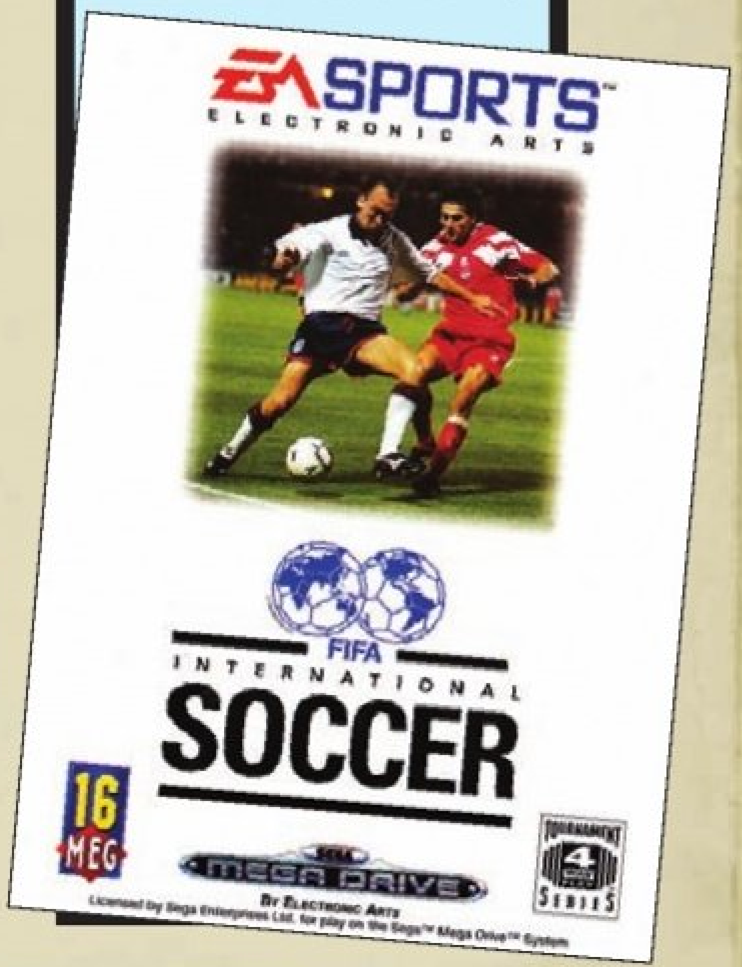



**AMIGA**

1 International Sensible Soccer (Renegade/Mindscape)
2 Arcade Pool (Team17)
3 Tactical Manager (Black Legend)
4 Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
5 K240 (Gremlin Graphics)

**MEGA DRIVE**

1 FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
2 Sonic The Hedgehog 3 (Sega)
3 NBA Jam (Acclaim)
4 Aladdin (Sega)
5 Mortal Kombat (Acclaim)



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** GORDON SINCLAIR
» **JOINED:** 18TH JULY 2008
» **LOCATION:** STUCK ON LEVEL 2
» **OCCUPATION:** REPLAY EXPO ORGANISER
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM

# Moley Christmas

THE HOLY MOLEY!

#45



» ZX SPECTRUM
» TEQUE/GREMLIN GRAPHICS
» 1987

**In the Eighties it was great. We got a white Christmas every year, no repeats on the telly and wars would stop (okay, so none of those are true, but that was how it felt back then). Best of all were the Christmas specials that filled the magazine stands. Going through the *TV* and *Radio Times* with a marker, ringing all the shows that you wanted to watch, cracking open a new five-pack of three-hour videotapes to record *Morecambe and Wise* and *The Two Ronnies*.**

But even better than that were the festive issues of your favourite computer magazines – big double issues with a snowy scene on the cover and plenty of pictures of staffers in silly hats. I was a *Crash* man, but for one issue a year I would put aside the rivalry with my *Your Sinclair*-loving enemies and buy both. But what made the magazines extra special were the tapes stuck to the cover. Gone were the limited demos of up-and-coming games, to be replaced with full commercial games and brand new specials. In 1987, Gremlin Graphics and *Your Sinclair* combined to produce one of the best Christmas cover tapes ever.

*Moley Christmas* is a six-screen game in the *Monty Mole* series. After tackling the miner's strike and the increasing influence of Europe on local politics, Monty's next exploits centred around one of those unsung professions that work tirelessly over the Christmas period. No, not nurses, or policemen, or firemen; this game is about those hard-working games journalists, and has you running around the *Your Sinclair* offices to find a disk containing the free game for the cover of the Christmas issue. The disk needs to be taken to the mastering plant and the tapes duplicated, followed by a trip back to the *YS* offices before the magazine hits the newsstand. It's typical Monty fare, and with only six screens it isn't the most in-depth game, but Monty does what Monty does best, and this was the perfect game to see you through Boxing Day while you waited for the shops to re-open so you could get some batteries for your Big Trak. *

**Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net**

FREE!




# COVERTAPE

## What began as an occasional freebie stuck to the front of 8-bit computer magazines quickly evolved into an essential weapon in the war to win readers. Martyn Carroll rewinds back to the early Eighties to chart the unstoppable advance of the covertape

**The first covertape of real significance appeared on the December 1984 issue of *Personal Computer Games* magazine. *PCG* and other magazines had previously covermounted flexidiscs containing programs, and *Big K* gave away a blank cassette on its first issue, but here was a tape containing actual commercial software. And it would change everything.**

The *PCG* tape was a proper Christmas present for readers, offering ten demos across three different formats (ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 and BBC Micro) in return for a 20p increase on




# WARS

the cover price. There was some decent content on there too, including playable demos of *Jasper* (Spectrum) and *Eureka!* (C64). Six of the demos weren't playable, but even just watching a game often proved invaluable when making buying decisions. And of course, once you'd tired of the demos, you had a C30 cassette which you could use to save your own programs or – ahem – back-up your legitimately purchased games.

Bob Wade, staff writer on *PCG* at the time, reveals that the covertape concept was all down to editor Chris Anderson. He says: "I can't remember what got Chris thinking of the idea, but it was inspired. I think that the idea of a tape on a magazine had already been done, but those only included listings rather than commercial games or demos, so this really was a giant leap forward. Of course, with hindsight, the easy part was having the idea; actually putting something like that together – negotiating with software houses, getting the demos in, getting the tapes mastered, sorting out covermounting and so on – was a huge undertaking in those days."

Bob reveals that no money changed hands, as the tape was mutually beneficial to both the magazine publisher and the software companies who were involved. "The demos weren't paid for and I don't recall software publishers paying to be on the tape. It was a chance for them to promote their game, so they bore the cost of producing their demos, and a chance for us to promote the magazine, so we bore the cost of producing the tape."

The effort seemed in vain, however, as publisher VNU closed *PCG* just two issues later. To an outsider it would appear that the covertape was a failed bid to generate interest in a struggling magazine. "I wasn't party to the

MEGA GIFT




behind-the-scenes finances of the magazine," says Bob, "but this certainly wasn't a last throw of the dice as far as the editorial team was concerned. For us it was a hugely exciting time; an opportunity that we expected to take us to the top of the tree in computer games magazines, particularly in terms of taking on arch rival at the time, *Computer And Video Games*. I dare say it was a financial gamble, because it hadn't been done before and of course adding the tape significantly increased production costs, but as gambles go I think it was a pretty good one to take."

It turned out to be a very good gamble as, having left VNU, Chris discovered that sales of the covertape issue of *PCG* had been "amazing". Following a brief spell at Newsfield, where he launched *Zzap!64* magazine, Chris founded Future Publishing in 1985. The new outfit debuted with *Amstrad Action* and the covertape idea was quickly brought to the table.

> **"A covertape was always a big boost to sales, but it had to be…"**
> BOB WADE, AMSTRAD ACTION

The first tape appeared on the fourth issue (dated Christmas 1985) and, rather than a bunch of demos, it featured two full, previously unreleased games from Ocean Software – one-on-one fighter *Kung Fu* and space-skating oddity *Number One*. They were both very average but for a 50p hike on the usual cover price you couldn't really complain.

Future wasn't complaining either, as sales of issue four were reportedly double that of the previous issues. In fact, in a recent interview with Neil Reive of *Amstrad Action Tribute Magazine*, Chris revealed that the covertape actually saved the magazine – and by extension Future Publishing – from an early grave. It turned out that *AA* had gotten off to a very slow start, yet Future's distributor had overestimated sales of the early issues. If the true figures had been reported, Chris claims that *Amstrad Action* would have been canned before issue four had a chance to be published.

"A covertape was always a big boost to sales," says Bob, who joined up with Chris at Future and later became editor of *AA*. "But it had to be, because the costs of production and covermounting were high. Retaining those readers for future, non-covermounted issues was always the challenge."

*AA* dabbled with covertapes for several years, and its chunky Christmas issues always carried one. The mag pretty much created the template that others would later follow, with each tape containing at least one full game (either something new or something previously released), several demos and some additional content in the form of utilities or game cheat/poke routines. What's noticeable is that *AA* didn't face too much competition from other Amstrad publications, so the tapes were more about offering added value to readers than trying to outdo rivals. Things were very different in the Spectrum mag space, where covertapes would be deployed in the fight for market-share.



» [C64] When the *Katakis* demo was pulled, US Gold oldie *Time Tunnel* was dusted down and used as an eleventh-hour replacement.

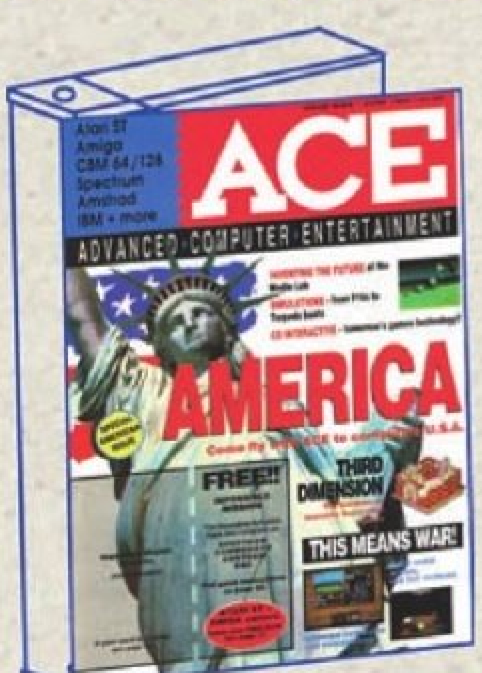



## BATTLE COMMENCES

**By the end of 1985 there were three main Spectrum magazines.** EMAP's *Sinclair User* and Newsfield's *Crash*

# COOL SPOOLS

Our selection of the ten best covertapes ever compiled, in no particular order




### ACE #9

**Issue date: June 1988**

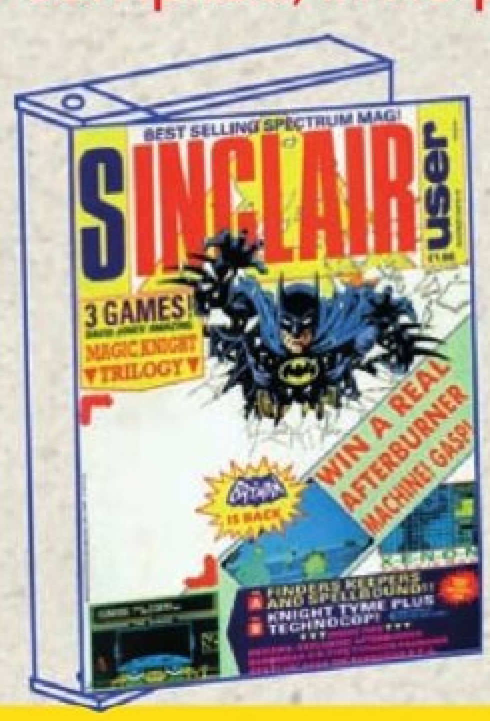
*ACE* magazine carried the occasional covertape in its first couple of years, and this was the best. Catering for its multi-format readership, it featured the blockbusting *Impossible Mission* on not one, not two, but four different formats (C64, CPC, BBC and Spectrum).




### YOUR SINCLAIR #22

**Issue date: October 1987**

The famous covertape that turned everyone *Batty*. *YS* gobsmacked the other mags when it managed to secure this awesome *Arkanoid* beater. The game could have easily been sold as a full-price title thanks to its instant appeal and celebrated two-player mode.




### SINCLAIR USER #81

**Issue date: December 1988**

*YS* might have whacked two tapes on its Christmas '88 issue, yet *SU* stuck with one and managed to come out on top by including the first three Magic Knight games (*Finders Keepers*, *Spellbound* and *Knight Tyme*). Hours of puzzling, platforming fun, right there.




### SINCLAIR USER #105

**Issue date: November 1990**

The first of the ambitious 'Six of the Best' tapes was so good that *SU* never managed to top it. It featured six full games, including *Tai-Pan*, *Rygar*, *Solomon's Key* and a trio from Spanish software house Topo Soft, plus a playable demo of Ocean's heavy-hitting *Battle Command*.




### CRASH #65

**Issue date: June 1989**

This was the first issue of *Crash* to carry a regular covertape and it got off to a cracking start. There was a special version of *Dizzy* plus three fantastic full games – arcade blaster *Moon Cresta*, classic platformer *Wanted: Monty Mole* and the sublime 3D game *Micronaut One*.

were both tussling for top spot with average monthly sales of around 100,000 copies each, while Dennis Publishing's *Your Spectrum* was trailing in third place selling half that amount. *Your Spectrum* was re-launched in December 1985 as *Your Sinclair* (the name change allowing it to cover other Sinclair computers like the QL and the, er, QL), and the first, new-look issue came with a covertape featuring a playable demo of Firebird's *Rasputin*. It proved to be a neat tie-in. The game was awarded 9/10 in the same issue, and if you still weren't convinced that it was a must-buy game you could load up the tape and give it a test-run. The coverprice stayed the same too, so it was a true freebie.

Nothing would then happen for more than a year. *SU* and *Crash* didn't bother with covertapes, and *YS* wouldn't include another until May 1987. Like *Amstrad Action* had done previously, *YS* persuaded Ocean to hand over a previously unreleased game called *Road Race*. The background is that Ocean commissioned an external programmer to convert Konami's MSX racing game *Hyper Rally* to the Spectrum, but when the end result proved to be somewhat less than hyper, it was offloaded to *Your Sinclair* instead.

Anyone worried that covertapes would become dumping grounds for shoddy, sub-standard games was in for surprise when the October 1987 issue of *YS* arrived. Amazingly, the mag had somehow managed to snare the awesome *Arkanoid* clone *Batty* from Elite. Following that coup, *YS* continued to irregularly covermount decent full games, and the rival Spectrum mags soon adopted their own covertape strategies. *Crash* moved first, sticking a seven-demo 'sampler' on its October 1987 issue. *SU*, meanwhile, was the last mag to adopt covertapes, but it was the first to make them a regular feature. Beginning in March 1988, the mag included a tape on every issue until it shut up shop five years later. *YS* would follow suit with regular tapes from October 1988 onwards, and *Crash* would do the same from June 1989.

Despite fierce competition between the Spectrum magazines, the general arrangements between the publishers and the software houses remained the same, with neither party actually handing over any money.

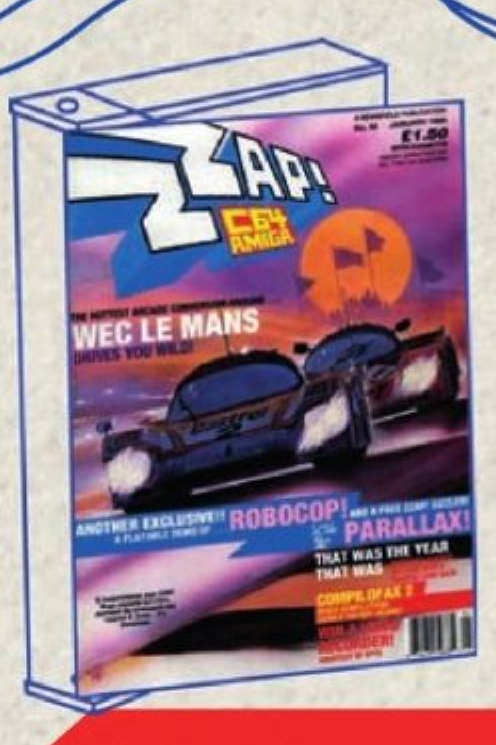
Matt Bielby, editor of *YS* between 1989 and 1991, explains: "What game went on the cover, what demos went on the tapes, and what complete old game was featured all went hand-in-hand. My first issue as editor, for instance, had a demo of System 3's *Dominator* on the front, and to secure that System 3 had to find us a game from somewhere, either part of their old back catalogue or something they could get from elsewhere, which in that case turned out to be a really crap Electric Dreams game called *Explorer*."

"Playable demos were the real currency," says Jim Douglas, editor of *SU* from 1989 to 1990. "We'd be talking about demos with software companies as part of an overall package of editorial content. A good demo tied in with a good cover of a strong release would sell mags. We would see a 25 per cent circulation spike on a big game. As soon as magazine publishers understood that a good demo would sell them more magazines and software companies saw how powerful putting a good demo in the hands of keen gamers, then a lot of negotiation and bidding went

## TAPE TROUBLES

WHILE COVERTAPES WERE popular with readers and always boosted sales, Bob Wade reveals that behind the scenes they caused real headaches, especially in the early days. "I can't overestimate the nightmare hassle it was putting something like that together," he says. "At the time it simply wasn't something you could do very often, because no-one was set up for it. Now, doing a demo is part of the PR programme from the start, but back then it meant going to a software house and literally having them get programmers to stop what they were doing and code a demo specially, and of course it was often just one person doing the coding! So yes, once we'd done the first *PCG* tape – which was multi-format, don't forget; what a nightmare to deal with that was! – it was always on the agenda to do more covermounts, but wanting it and doing it were very different things!"




**ZZAP!64 #45**
**Issue date: January 1989**
A demo of Ocean's hit *Robocop* was decent enough, but the real star of the show was the full version of *Parallax*, a game that sizzled when reviewed just three years earlier. It hadn't even been released as a budget title at that point, yet it was given away on the tape.



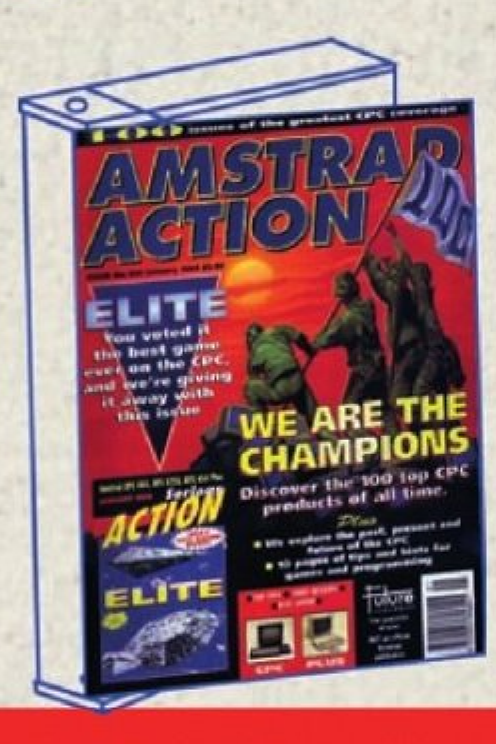

**ZZAP!64 #78**
**Issue date: October 1991**
The last issue of the magazine to be published by Newsfield just happened to feature one of the best covertapes in its history. *Doomdark's Revenge* was on there (*The Lords Of Midnight* had appeared on the previous month's tape) along with the classic C64 caper *Spy Vs. Spy*.




**COMMODORE FORMAT #7**
**Issue date: April 1991**
Not a demo in sight on this 'Power Pack' tape. Instead, just a line-up of four complete games: *Uridium*, *Blue Max*, *5th Gear* and *Crystal Castles*. It was worth it purely for Andrew Braybrook's awesome *Uridium* – the other games included were just an added bonus.




**AMSTRAD ACTION #67**
**Issue date: April 1991**
The magazine's first 'Action Pack' covertape was a real winner, with two top titles – Codemasters' all-conquering *Dizzy* and FTL's excellent isometric adventure *Hydrofool*. Rounding out the package was a playable demo of Ocean's movie license *Total Recall*.




**AMSTRAD ACTION #100**
**Issue date: January 1994**
They didn't come much bigger or better than this. In a poll, *AA* readers voted *Elite* as the best Amstrad CPC game ever released, and to celebrate the mag's 100th issue, they gave it away on the covertape. No other games or demos were included; none were needed.




on – less in financial terms but in terms of front-cover treatments and the timing of editorial coverage. A big part of my job on *Sinclair User* was securing demos so I'd always be on the train to Manchester and Birmingham, talking with the guys at Ocean and US Gold about securing exclusive demos. We had a great run with Ocean. We had a string of exclusive playable demos for big releases like *Operation Wolf* and *Batman* tied into cover packages. Gary Bracey at Ocean and I worked on those deals and it felt like a really exciting time."

Anyone expecting stories of outrageous skulduggery as editors tried to lock down the best content for their covertapes is bound to be disappointed. There were no dodgy deals or backhanders or anything like that. "There were no bidding wars as such," says Matt. "We'd go to US Gold and do a deal, and *Sinclair User* would go to Ocean, and *Crash* would go to Domark. Or the other way around. Occasionally we'd be gutted because one of the other magazines had got a really good game. Mostly, though, we'd mock their line-up mercilessly, always secretly aware that ours was probably just as bad. Of course, we'd always try to get something good, negotiating like mad to persuade the software house to cough up something worth more than 60 per cent."

Some great games and demos graced the various tapes, but it quickly got out of hand with the magazines cramming on as much content as they could. It became a case of quantity over quality. *YS* was the first to go a bit crazy, slapping two tapes on the front of its December 1988 issue. And that was just the beginning.

Matt says: "As the covertape wars hotted up, *YS* started putting out what we called a 'Four Pack', usually with two or three games and one or two demos. Later still the magazine started putting six or seven things on its tapes."

"There was something of an arms race," adds Jim. "Two demos! Five demos! Double-sided tapes! Two tapes! It did get out of hand. We all started using shareware – or shovelware – to fill the tapes just to claim the most content. Then everyone came to their senses and looked at the huge cost of unsold issues. The tapes were costing something like 20 pence each to duplicate, so if you put on two and they don't sell you'd have a major problem. So in the end there was more of a push toward quality."

## FIGHTING SPREADS

**For readers of Commodore 64 magazines, covertapes weren't such a prevalent part of the landscape – at least initially.** The first tape of note appeared on the June 1987 issue of *Zzap!64*, where Newsfield tested the water with a 'sampler' featuring several demos and a Rob Hubbard audio track. EMAP's *Commodore User* also ran a demo tape in November 1987.

*Zzap!* would then run four 'Mega-Tapes' on successive issues from October 1988 to January 1989. The first tape was supposed to include a demo of Rainbow Arts' shooter *Katakis*, but there was a problem due to the game's similarity to a well-known coin-op. "We got into hot water over the *Katakis* tape," says Gordon Houghton, who was editor of *Zzap!* at the time. "The holders of the *R-Type* license, Activision, objected to *Katakis*'s existence and the tapes had to be pulled." US Gold's *Time Tunnel* was hastily used in its place.

Covertapes made semi-regular appearances on *Zzap!* throughout 1988/89. Gordon believes that those early tapes didn't increase sales enough to warrant them appearing on every issue. "Part of the problem was with the assessment of reader numbers," he says. "You only got true circulation figures every six months, so it was hard to accurately predict whether what you were doing was increasing readership. But the main issue was with the C64 losing out to the Amiga. The reader

## A QUESTION OF INTEGRITY

We wondered if the inclusion of demos on covertapes ever challenged editorial integrity when it came to reviewing games. Here's what some of the editors we spoke to said:

### Bob Wade



No one was ever guaranteed favourable coverage in the magazine for their finished game. Obviously providing a demo meant that it was featured in the magazine too and we never made critical judgments of a game based on a demo, so that coverage was 'neutral' at worst. Being on the tape never influenced a game review, though. Those were always sacrosanct.

### Gordon Houghton



No, there was never any connection between the two. *Zzap!* had quite a bit of clout back then, and its reputation relied on its honest opinions. In fact, the only time I was pressured about any game by any publisher was over *Hawkeye* in my first month as editor. In that case the PR guy was just very enthusiastic, and bloody relentless, and managed to convince me that it was maybe a few percentage marks better than it actually was.

### Matt Bielby



The games industry was smaller and less corporate in those days. Many of the companies we dealt with all had in-house PR people and did the covertape deals themselves, and bought the advertising themselves. This made the chances of falling-outs between editorial teams and the bosses of companies much more likely, much more immediate and much more personal than they ever are now. I remember some blazing rows, and no, there wasn't a general consensus that review scores couldn't be bought. Blatant attempts to bribe magazines would occur, pleading and emotional blackmail would be tried with the intention of trying to push to up a score. As I remember it we always held strong, but I'm sure I'd be lying if I said I didn't at least consider caving in once or twice, at least for a millisecond.

» [Spectrum] Stuart Campbell named *Deathchase* as the best Spectrum game ever, then J Nash gave it away on the *YS* issue 91 covertape.






» The first issue of the re-launched *Your Sinclair* came bundled with a playable demo of Firebird's *Rasputin*.

# GARY BRACY Q&A

**We've heard from various magazine editors, but what about the software publishers? We had a quick chat with Gary Bracey, former development director at Ocean Software, to find out his perspective**



**Retro Gamer: How did you divvy up the demos between the various magazines? Did you just try to be fair, or was it more about the relationships you had with the actual magazines?**
**Gary Bracey:** The proper answer would be fairness, but in truth it was a combination of relationships and the influence/circulation of the magazines. I got on very well with Jim Douglas at *Sinclair User* and Teresa Maughan at *Your Sinclair*, and also became mates with the likes of Julian Rignall and Gary Penn at Newsfield. Although it was big business, we all had a very good time and it became more of a fraternity. No-one brought heavy-handedness to negotiations. It was all very pally back then. Boring, but true!

**RG: Was it difficult to get the coders to stop working on the actual game and take time out to put the demo together?**
**GB:** The developers were very proud of their games and understood the importance of marketing and maximising sales. There were always time pressures on finishing the game and so requests for a demo were never completely embraced with happy smiles, but I don't recall any specific hissy fits thrown.

**RG: How important were demos when it came to promoting a new game?**
**GB:** People have a choice and so before they turn over their hard-earned cash for a game they need to make an informed decision. Reviews and good buzz are important but nothing is better than the experience of trying a complete level of a game. Of course, if the game was crap then we were less likely to make a demo!

profile became younger, a lot of the older readers went on to Amiga mags, so I think at best we only had a minimal rise in numbers thanks to the tapes."

*Zzap!* and other C64 mags began to cater for Amiga owners, but this introduced another challenge: how were they supposed to provide covermounted content for both groups of readers? *Commodore User* dropped on the idea of selling the mag with either a C64 tape or Amiga disk on the front, and if you couldn't find your preferred format in the shops you could send off a coupon and receive it through the post. The fact that *CU* only ran dual-format covermounts twice suggests it wasn't a cost-effective solution.

During 1990, *CU* dropped support for the C64 to concentrate solely on the Amiga. There was still plenty of life – and healthy rivalry – left in the C64 mag market, however, and covertapes finally became a requisite on *Zzap!* and *Your Commodore*. 1990 also saw Future launch a new C64 mag, *Commodore Format*, and it too carried a regular covertape. "It was part of our company strategy," says launch editor Steve Jarratt. "Future was a leading proponent of cover gifts as a way of driving sales so it was never a question of whether the mag would or wouldn't have a tape."

> **" We'd mock their line-up mercilessly, always aware that ours was probably just as bad "**
> MATT BIELBY, YOUR SINCLAIR

Speaking about the general arrangements *Commodore Format* had with software publishers, he continues: "We would try to avoid cash exchanges where possible. We'd agree to run demos in return for old full games. Of course, these games were pretty much surplus to requirements – they couldn't really be sold, so giving them away wasn't really an issue for publishers with old stock. I do remember paying for a small game on the first issue's tape called *Revolution* that one coder had written and had never been seen before."

*Revolution* was a previously unreleased shoot-'em-up by C64 coder Simon Pick, and *CF* stumped up £2,000 for the rights to the game. Paying for covertape content would become more and more common during the early Nineties as the big software publishers shifted their focus to 16-bit formats. The number of 8-bit playable demos on offer dwindled so the magazines had no alternative but to put their hands in their pockets in order to keep filling the tapes. This money came from the magazines' existing budgets, so it was inevitable that cover prices would rise and page counts would fall.

## THE DUST SETTLES

**Your Sinclair outlived the other Spectrum magazines, yet by mid-1993 it was down to 36 pages and cost £2.50 per issue.** Readers were essentially paying for the covertape, so it was a good job that they contained some corking games likes *Chaos*, *Rebelstar*, *Deathchase* and

» Where it all began. *Personal Computer Games* magazine gives the lowdown on its groundbreaking covertape.



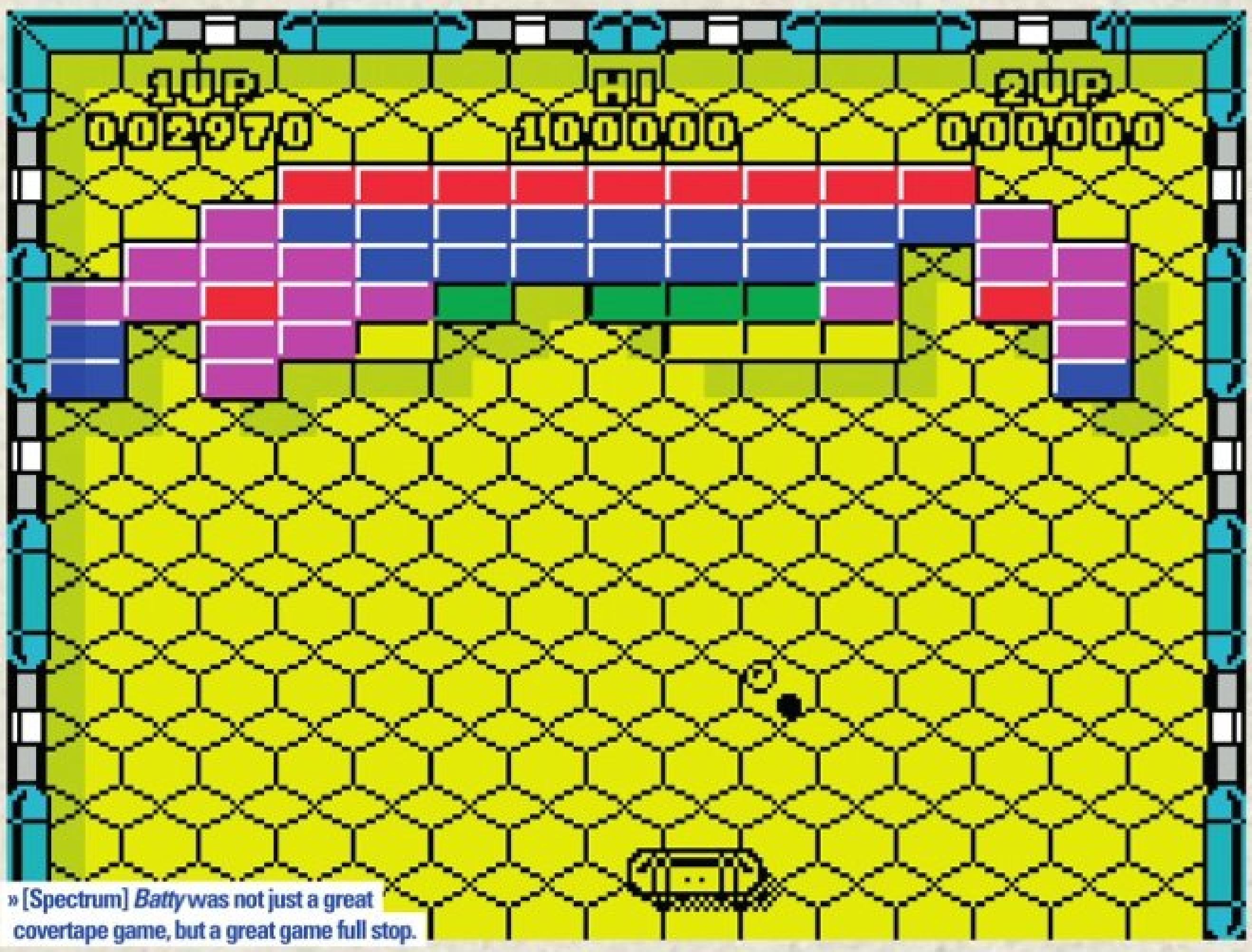
IT'S YOURS! THE PCG CHRISTMAS MEGA-GIFT

48K SPECTRUM

Jasper! by Micromega

48K SPECTRUM

Strangeloop by Virgin



» [Spectrum] *Batty* was not just a great covertape game, but a great game full stop.

*Bored Of The Rings*. This was due to the timely intervention of one J Nash, who joined the magazine at the beginning of 1993.

"The *YS* covertapes were rubbish for yonks," he says. "This is because they were assigned to the admin side so nobody knew what constituted a decent game. When I arrived, I lobbied for the responsibility and received the quasi-papal blessing to do whatever I liked."

Grabbing decent content for the tapes was far from easy, however. "I'd run a finger down the official list of *YS* contacts and ask if they wanted to bung game X on the covertape for Y pounds, where X was something I personally liked and Y was very nearly several pence. If I could find the developers themselves they were delighted to accept rent money in return for resurrecting a game they'd forgotten they'd written. For a publisher, they'd either not know what I was on about, or they'd discover the rights had been sold on, or they'd openly scoff at the sums involved. The covertape budget was £500. Typically, I'd try to nab a popular game for £300-£400, then split the difference between the flashy demos and supporting games. Generally, the mix was an action game, an adventure, a SAM game, a demo and whatever I could find to fill the leftover space."

One of those bits was YS2, a Teletext-style digital mag that debuted on the June 1993 issue and featured pages of supreme daftness. J Nash says: "I was thoroughly dispirited on the readers' behalf by the recent mag cutbacks to 36 pages, and bunging a ton of lost jokes on the covertape seemed a crafty workaround." YS2 was short-lived, however, as Future closed *YS* a few issues later. The mag went out with a pleasing bang, as September 1993's 'Big Final Issue' featured 68 pages instead of the usual 36 – and no covertape.

The remaining 8-bit mags would also bite the bullet over the next couple of years. The last issue of *Commodore Force* (formally *Zzap!64*) was dated March 1994. *Amstrad Action* closed in June 1995, and *Commodore Format* soldiered on until October 1995. And with that, the days of the commercial covertape were over.

## AFTER THE WAR

**Looking back, some may bemoan the emphasis that publishers placed on covertapes at the expense of the magazines themselves, particularly in the Nineties.** And it did get a bit silly at times, with mags like *Sinclair User* sticking up to 12 programs on a single issue. But for many, it was genuinely exciting to see what software the in-house teams would manage to secure each month. Playing a demo of the next big thing was a real buzz, and it was great to be given games that had retailed at full price just a few years before.

Of the magazine editors we spoke to, the general consensus is that covertapes were a win for everyone – good for the readers, good for the magazines, good for the games companies. "I think cover tapes were a fantastic part of the landscape," says Jim Douglas. "They were innovative, they gave gamers hands-on experience of games and they really enhanced the editorial offering. Every now and again it would create tensions between the games publishers and the magazine publishers when one party felt a deal wasn't properly honoured, an embargo was broken, and so on, but that was purely down to the fact that people recognised how powerful the tapes were."




"I had no problem at all with them in principle," says Matt Bielby. "But I hated having to stick these messy tapes on our lovely covers, and I hated the hassle of sorting out a decent line-up each month, and I hated having to check them to make sure they worked, and having to deal with all the readers who, inevitably, couldn't get them to work. But I was lucky enough to be in charge during the period when *YS* rose from being the worst-selling of the three Speccy mags to being top dog. Amazing though it may seem, the fact we put the likes of *Dizzy* on the tapes must have had something to do with it!"

> **"It was never a question of whether the mag would or wouldn't have a tape"**
> STEVE JARRATT, COMMODORE FORMAT




"Covertapes were absolutely a win all round," says Bob Wade, "for magazines, publishers and readers alike. That's borne out by the fact that it's still a key aspect of publishing games today, although it's a lot more sophisticated now of course. Long gone are the days of sticking a slow-loading cassette on a magazine."

**Special thanks to Frank Gasking and Stephen 'Mort' Stuttard for their help.**



# THE MAKING OF BATTY

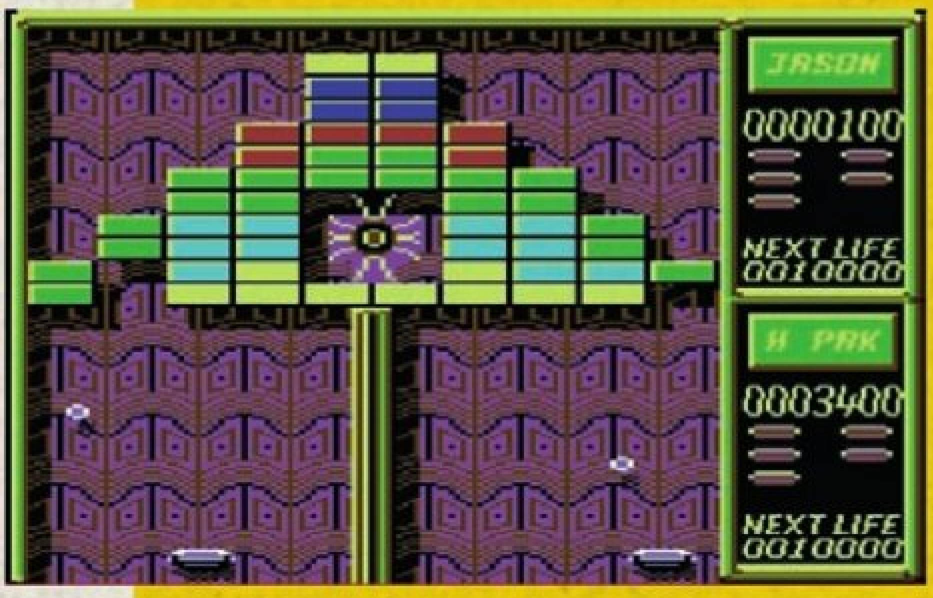
## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ELITE SYSTEMS
- » **DEVELOPER:** JASON BENHAM
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PLATFORM:** C64, SPECTRUM, CPC
- » **GENRE:** BAT 'N' BALL
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2









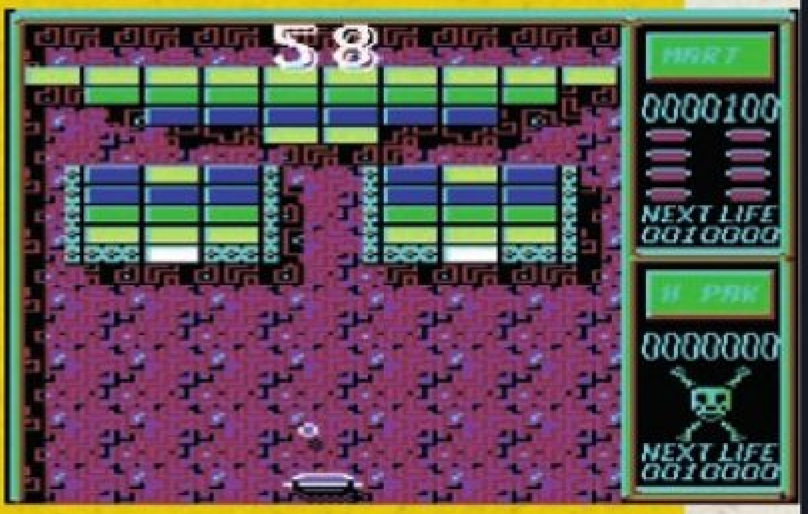

### Coder Jason Benham reveals the origins of the lookalike bat 'n' ball game that went on to become a Spectrum covertape smash hit…

**Retro Gamer: What's the history behind *Batty*?**
**Jason Benham:** The history is that I independently made an *Arkanoid* clone for the Commodore 64. Living in a small seaside town – Redcar – I had access to all the latest games in the arcades, and I could get right through to the end of the *Arkanoid* with maybe a couple of continues. I wanted to make a game that could do everything *Arkanoid* could do and more, hence the enemies firing shots that stun you, the extra power-ups, the bricks you can only destroy from the top, metal walls, and so on. From what I remember, *Batty* took around three or four months to create while working at home.

**RG: How did you go about getting the game published?**
**JB:** I originally submitted the game to Superior Software in Leeds, who had published my previous C64 game *The Legend Of Sinbad*, but the guys there felt it was too close to the upcoming licensed versions of *Arkanoid* for comfort and passed on it. I then discovered that Elite Systems was looking to put out an *Arkanoid* clone on multiple platforms. Elite scooped it up and I was paid a lump sum, maybe £4,000 or so, from what I remember. Despite making games on the VIC-20 and C64 since 1982, it was the first game where I actually got paid a decent amount!

**RG: Did Elite ask you to make any design changes to the game?**
**JB:** Elite requested a few small changes. I was asked to improve the graphics for the bat and change the intro music a little as I had completely copied it from *Arkanoid*! The magnetic field that would deflect the ball was also requested later on. Aside from that, everything else was in my original submission. The extra-power ups, aliens firing and multiplayer mode were ported to the other platforms based on the C64 version.

**RG: Did you have anything to do with the Spectrum and Amstrad versions?**
**JB:** I never dealt directly with the guys making versions for other platforms, so there wasn't really any parallel development except when adding features at the end. The magnet-in-the-playfield idea was taken from either the Amstrad or Speccy version. It's the main feature over which I had little design input.




**RG: Were you happy with how the game turned out?**
**JB:** The feature I'm most proud of is the two-player mode. I know other games from that era did something similar – *TRAZ* maybe – but it added a lot to the frenetic gameplay. I was upset that it was never released as a standalone product. I think it only came out on the *Hit Pak* collection.

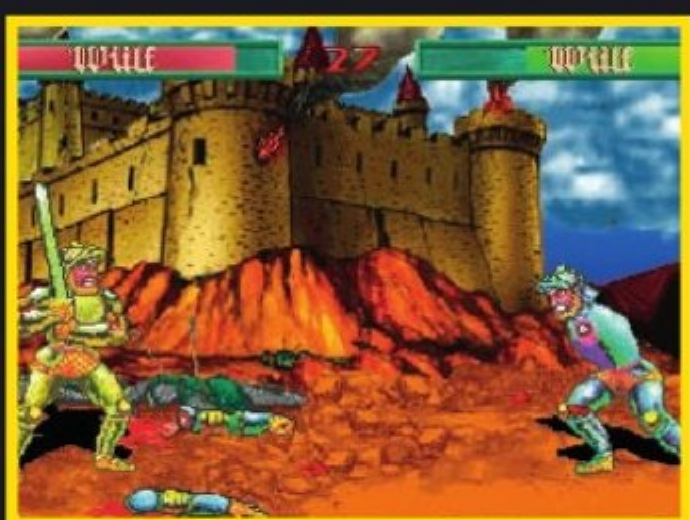
**RG: It was released on Elite's budget label as well. How do you think *Batty* held up to home versions of *Arkanoid*?**
**JB:** I was very pleased with the game, especially compared to the original *Arkanoid*. The sequel, *Revenge Of Doh*, had a few cool power-ups that mine didn't have, but the two-player mode in *Batty* really made the difference. If you got two players together who liked the game, you could just play for hours and lose track of time.

## GOING BATTY

THE REASON WHY the brilliant *Batty* ended up being given away on a *Your Sinclair* covertape isn't entirely clear. Elite boss Steve Wilcox tells us that he spent a lot of time (and money) having the legalities looked at with regards to *Batty* being very similar to *Arkanoid*, which had been licensed by Ocean. It would appear that, rather than risk a legal challenge, the game was given away on *YS* (and included on compilations) so as not to directly compete with *Arkanoid* as a full-price title. Whatever the reason, the clear winner was *YS*, which was able to reward its readers with an amazing game that was arguably better than Ocean's official *Arkanoid* conversion.

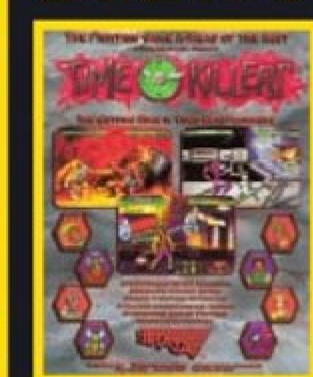
» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

# TIME KILLERS



» [Arcade] During battles it's possible to lose both arms and continue with the fight. Now that's dedication.

## GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHER:** STRATA
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP




» [Arcade] *Time Killers* did receive a late (1996) Genesis/Mega Drive port. As you would imagine, it's shoddier than its arcade parent.

**In the centre of *Mortal Kombat* versus *Street Fighter II* mania many developers released copycat games in a bid to capitalise on the popular fighting game trend their rivalry sparked, and *Time Killers* is notable for being one of the earliest to emerge.**

Released a month after *Mortal Kombat* arrived in amusement arcades, this weapon-based 2D fighter by Incredible Technologies belied a shocking amount of gore with its odd Saturday Morning Cartoon aesthetics.

As its title implies, *Time Killers* fused a history theme to its fisticuffs, one that saw eight fighters from different periods of time fighting it out, probably to prove that their epoch spawned the toughest fighter . Looking at the astonishinglly detailed entry about the game on Wikipedia, the story is a confusing mess that we couldn't wrap our head around – the final boss is Death, for example, but he's dressed like a supervillain.

Anyway, among its roster of eight time-travelling combatants were a samurai, a knight, a Viking, a caveman and a strange punk rocker chap with a chainsaw. According to the arcade game's handbook, the punk rocker character was framed for murder, but thankfully managed to track down the person responsible, but then murdered him. That's the level of characterisation we're dealing with here folks.

With decapitations and dismemberments, it's clear the makers of *Time Killers* wanted it to appeal to the bloodlusting *Mortal Kombat* crowd, and despite clearly being naff we'd be lying if we said we didn't find some amusement from its gory action.

Clearly a game that doesn't take itself seriously, *Time Killers* was notable for having a unique control system, one that saw its five attack buttons (one for each limb, plus oddly your character's head) laid out on the arcade dash in such a way as to represent the anatomy of a human being. It also had a variation of *MK*'s popular Fatalities too, imaginatively called Death Moves. Performed by pressing all five buttons simultaneously (high-fiving the cabinet effectively) the finisher would lop the head off your opponent to instantly end the fight. And weirdly, this move could be performed at any point during the tussle.

As well as causing heads to roll, it was also possible for fighters to chop off their opponent's arms and see them comically continue with the fight like *Monty Python And The Holy Grail*'s Black Knight, leaving them to headbutt their way to victory. And, if you were made armless, pressing the button that corresponded with the missing limb would cause your character to flick blood from the wound.

But for all the fun and charming stupidity on display, it still doesn't detract from the fact that *Time Killers* was a pretty average fighter. Strip away the surreal humour and comical levels of gore and you're left with a combat system that feels needlessly clunky, controls that feel irresponsive, animations that stutter along, and characters that all feel pretty unbalanced.

Despite this, *Time Killers* did receive a home port for the Genesis in the US, and even an arcade sequel too. Retaining the weapon and gore-based antics of *Time Killers*, while dropping the silly time travel premise, *Blood Storm*, as it was titled, was released two years later and proved to be a far better game than its predecessor. That's not really saying a great deal though.

### WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED

*Mortal Kombat* may not have been the most sophisticated or smoothest of fighting games, but if you compare it to the gameplay of *Time Killers* you'll probably discover a newfound respect for it. *Mortal Kombat* did silly, but applied just enough of it to its gameplay, moves and characters to ensure it didn't feel entirely throwaway – something *Time Killers* simply failed to grasp.



## » THE POINTLESS PARTS




**TIME BANDITS**

Rather than come up with its own cast of characters, the creators of *Time Killers* hit the history books and clichés instead.



**BLOODY CARTOONS**

The visuals have an odd cartoon appearance, which stand at severe odds with the gory nature of the gameplay.



**UPHILL BATTLE**

Combat is satisfying at first but wears thin. Each character has a meagre repertoire and essentially the same finisher.

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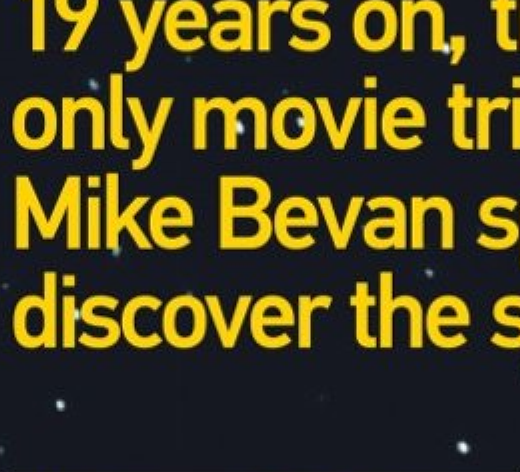
AND FROM ALL GOOD NEWSAGENTS

IMAGINE PUBLISHING



# Super Star Wars Trilogy

**19 years on, the Super Star Wars games remain the only movie trilogy to make it onto a single console. Mike Bevan speaks to director Kalani Streicher to discover the secrets of the epic platform saga**




## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** JVC/NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS/ SCUPLTURED SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992-1994
- » **PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM/SPACE COMBAT

**Cast your mind back to a time not so long ago when the Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive were the game console kings, and a certain Mr. Lucas had given us a mere three instalments of his interstellar movie juggernaut; the bonafide sci-fi classics *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and another one with Ewoks. Released in 1992, *Super Star Wars* was a state-of-the-art mix of platform action and 3D shoot-'em-up sections, culminating in the famous X-Wing trench run – arguably the closest interactive experience the film franchise had yet seen. It became a major ace in the sleeve for Nintendo's battle against arch-rival Sega, and a future benchmark for action games on the SNES.**

"I started working at Lucasfilm Games in 1988 as a designer/ programmer," recalls Kalani Streicher, producer and lead designer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy. "At the time they were trying to expand into the European markets and looking for someone who was fluent in German. I fitted the bill and they hired me immediately. My first project was *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* with lead designer David Fox. As we were finishing the game I started working on porting and localising all of the story games such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* into various European languages on a variety of platforms." After building up and managing LucasArts' localisation department, and a brief programming stint on Brian Moriarty's *Loom*, Kalani finally asked the question many working at the company had been itching to for years. Lucasfilm had previously shied away from entering *Star Wars* territory for its gaming releases, the nearest it had come being an abandoned attempt at a point-and-click adventure from Hal Barwood, designer of *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*.

"Lucasfilm was very focused on the PC platforms, such as the IBM, Mac, Amiga and Atari ST," explains Kalani. "A bunch of us wanted to work on console games and a handful of them wanted to work on *Star Wars*, including myself. Basically we asked our manager, Steve Arnold, 'Why aren't we on console, and why aren't we developing *Star Wars* games for it?" He replied, 'Do you guys want to do it? Go for it!' And off we



went building a *Star Wars* game for console." Kalani teamed up with Utah-based developer Sculptured Software, producing *Star Wars* for the NES, a platform action game based on the plot of the first movie which became a template for the later Super Nintendo title and its sequels, *Super Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*. The relationship with Sculptured would remain for all three Super Nintendo games.

"My vision was to create the first trilogy on a single platform for our fans," Kalani tells us. "We were slightly behind the curve getting onto the SNES, though in the end we pulled off the release of each game from the *Star Wars* trilogy back-to-back, year after year, which I'm very proud of." As an avid gamer himself, Kalani demonstrates admirable taste when revealing the titles that inspired his first Super Nintendo project. "I was a big fan of platform games and side-scrollers," he says. "*Contra, Super Castlevania, Turrican* and *Mega Man* on SNES were my favourite games. I was also playing the *Willow* arcade game, which inspired me to push the visual quality on the SNES above other games. I wanted it to be as good a side-scroller as *Contra* or *Castlevania,* with the visual quality of arcade games such as *Willow* or



» [SNES] Nothing's gonna stop Han getting to the Millenium Falcon; not even whatever this thing is.



» [SNES] The Cantina boss is based on one of the creatures in the film's holographic chess set.

*Street Fighter,* and vehicle gameplay using Mode 7 as seen in *F-Zero*."

Mode 7, the Super Nintendo's unique and much-touted graphics mode, allows for the rapid manipulation and scaling of a background 'landscape', the first instance in *Super Star Wars* being the early landspeeder stage, as Luke travels towards a Sandcrawler encountering a bunch of really annoying Jawas. Though primitive by modern standards, the use of this technique made recreating seminal vehicular *Star Wars* moments possible in a way that wowed gamers of the time. Later series highlights would include the Hoth Snowspeeder vs. AT-AT battles of *Super Empire Strikes Back*, and the gripping dash of the Millennium Falcon through the bowels of the unfinished Death Star Mk II in *Super Return Of The Jedi*.

"I wanted to allow players to interact with their favourite *Star Wars* vehicles in third or

**"We were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle-combat for the SNES"**

## IN THE BEGINNING

"YOU CAN'T START a *Star Wars* game without the crawler. That's inconceivable!" says Kalani of his homage to the famous opening of *A New Hope*. "I wanted the game to start exactly the same way as the movie, with the text crawler and the camera pan to the spaceship and planet. I wanted the player to truly believe they were watching a movie and immersing themselves immediately in becoming Luke Skywalker. The in-game cut-scenes were directly from the movies and/or photo archives. For me, the cut-scenes had the purpose of grounding the player to the authenticity of the movies, and then let them interact and explore the environments as they were playing the levels"






# SUPER STAR WARS TRILOGY



first-person perspective, and experience the different aspects they'd seen in the movies," says Kalani. "You might say we were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle combat for the SNES. I didn't want to utilise the vehicles in a side-scrolling or top-down fashion. I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy."

Indeed, the series succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of the films remarkably well, from the opening text crawl over Tatooine in *Super Star Wars*, to the Lucas-esque screen wipes and imposing rendition of John Williams' score. Each game closely follows the plot of the relevant film, transitioning through platform sections with memorable bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster, Boba Fett, and the Rancor, and interspersed with story-progressing cut-scenes. With a rich tapestry of characters, creatures and vehicles to draw on from the films, the team took pride in attempting to present as authentic a *Star Wars* console experience as possible. "I looked at every aspect of the movie in detail with the team and pointed out the environments and characters I wanted in the game," says Kalani. "We used reference materials and photos from Lucasfilm's photo library, and took reference pictures of the actual movie models from the Lucas Archives. Everybody on the team was a hardcore *Star Wars* fan. I was also producing the *X-Wing* game at the same time, which added even more extensive research of every spacecraft and ship in the game. I was heavily entrenched in getting the authenticity of the *Star Wars* universe into these games."

**"I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy"**

"Though from the beginning I wanted to retell the story of the movies in an interactive fashion," he continues, "I also knew, being the *Star Wars* geek myself, that I wanted to bring in elements that never were explained or expanded upon in the movies, especially areas or characters that were mentioned briefly in the films, such as fighting the *Star Wars* chess monster as a boss in the Cantina." Kalani is quick to praise what he describes as the "terrific relationship" between Lucasfilm and Sculptured Software over the course of the three games. "We were in control of all creative aspects of the game such as game design, art and animation, and Sculptured was responsible for coding the game," he explains. "Sculptured had a great engine, tools and development kits that allowed us to rapidly create levels and character animation. [Lead programmer] Peter Ward at Sculptured was an incredible engineer and a true *Star Wars* fan. I had such a blast working with him. Initially I created a design document outlining all specification and progression of the levels, characters and vehicles from the first to last



» [SNES] The lush backgrounds of the Dagobah sections are some of the prettiest in the series.


»[SNES] Moseying around Mos Eisley offered a whole lot of shades of beige to enjoy.



» [SNES] This ED-209-looking lumbering monstrosity guards the Death Star hanger bay.



» [SNES] Han attempts to escape the Carbonite freezing chamber. Hasn't he watched *Empire's* ending?



»[SNES] For *Star Wars* nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game.



level. We then did storyboards for the plot progression, cinematics and story panels. My concept and art lead Harrison Fong storyboarded a lot of them, which we then passed on to the team and converted it into digital artwork."

In the original *Super Star Wars*, one of the early stand-out platform stages involves Luke making his way to the top of a massive Sandcrawler brimming with hostile turrets and yet more pesky Jawas. "We did several iterations on the Sandcrawler and wanted to make the player feel like they were climbing up a huge vehicle and that the level was moving as you are jumping from platform to platform, "says Kalani. Later stages give players an opportunity to control alternate heroes, such as Chewbacca in the Cantina stage, or Han Solo taking on hordes of slightly inept stormtroopers en route to the Falcon in Mos Eisley. A ride in Han's iconic galactic rustbucket, a daring rescue, and a brush with a trash compacter later the famous Death Star run awaits you. "We knew from the start that we had to have this level, and this was the climax of the game," says Kalani of the famous X-Wing sequence. "It had to live up to the then-in-the-arcades *Star Wars* game trench run. The SNES and its Mode 7 feature were perfect for this and allowed us to give the player an incredible climactic moment."

Working with Mode 7 graphics proved very much a mixture of trial and error on *Super Star Wars*. "It was our first attempt to utilise Mode 7 in a different way than other games," Kalani explains. "The landspeeder stage had to show progression, moving across a desert towards the mountains in the distance. It was a fine balance of sprite usage for the terrain, enemy characters and distant parallaxing of the mountain range. We had to take that one step further with the X-Wing level, flying across the surface and then down the trench allowing the player to be able to move anywhere in space. And lastly integrating the Millenium Falcon took several iterations. It is such a unique ship that we fairly quickly ran out of sprites/tiles. We had to pull off every trick we had in the book for those sections." One interesting side note Kalani offers is that the atmospheric platform section set inside the Death Star nearly didn't make it into the finished game. "That level was difficult to pull off and barely avoided the chopping block," he remembers. "I remember contemplating many times cutting it, but I am glad that we found a way to make it work and keep it in the game."

For the sequels, Lucasflim and Sculptured continued to refine their game engine, packing in ever more content and visual advancements with the help of increased cartridge capacities. The series finale, *Super Return of the Jedi*, was the largest; with its 16-Megabit cart it was twice the size of the original *Super Star Wars*. The desire to innovate and improve was not without its share of technical stumbling blocks. "We were constantly pushing the SNES and adding as much content as possible from the *Star Wars* universe from one game to another, challenging and trying to outdo ourselves each time. In *Super Empire* the most challenging parts were of course the AT-AT /snowspeeder levels and the Millennium Falcon. These are iconic vehicles that needed to behave and feel like they did in the movie.

"For the AT-AT sequence, using Mode 7 for such a big vehicle was difficult. We were definitely pushing the capabilities of the SNES hardware. The cable release and circling of the snowspeeder was incredibly hard. We spent many long hours refining the gameplay to make it work. And in *Super Jedi* the speeder bike scene and final flight through the inside of the Death Star wasn't easy. For the speeder bike




## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**MANIAC MANSION** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
**YEAR:** 1987

**THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND**
**SYSTEM:** VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
**YEAR:** 1990

**INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS**
**SYSTEM:** PC DOS, MAC, AMIGA
**YEAR:** 1992

**X-WING**
**SYSTEM:** PC DOS, MAC
**YEAR:** 1993

## HEART-STOPPING MOMENTS

### SUPER STAR WARS



**R2-D2 has been** captured by Jawas, and Luke must battle to the top of an enormous Sandcrawler, then through its dingy, hazardous innards to rescue him.



**From farm boy** to starship pilot, young Skywalker's final challenge is the terrifying Death Star trench, and a face-off with Vader's TIE Advanced.

### SUPER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK



**As the Empire** attacks the Rebel base on Hoth, Luke grabs a snowspeeder and attempts to take down an incoming battalion of giant AT-AT walkers.



**The climactic showdown** high on the gantries of Bespin sees Luke having to draw upon all his newly-acquired Jedi skills in order to defeat his old man.

### SUPER RETURN OF THE JEDI



**Mean, bad-tempered and** certainly no oil-painting, the Rancor will leave you wondering if breaking into Jabba's palace was such a good idea after all.



**In the Millennium** Falcon, Lando Calrissian redeems himself with a daring raid on the unfinished Death Star II in the memorable finale of the saga.

# SUPER STAR WARS TRILOGY

chase the most difficult part was creating believable trees moving past at high speeds. Because of the difficulty I considered many other design perspectives such as isometric or top-down views, but they never felt as dramatic as the Mode 7 version."

One gameplay aspect that was greatly improved for both sequels was the addition of RPG-style character development, with Luke gradually gaining a number of useful Force Powers including the ability to heal, levitate, deflect attacks or even mind control enemies. The downside is that powers can be only be collected from certain locations in each game, meaning they can be easily missed by the not-so prudent Jedi. "Balancing the Force Powers wasn't easy," admits Kalani. "We had to anticipate players getting through a level with or without them. For me it was an integral part of character evolution and player progression (levelling up of a character) in adding Force Powers in *Super Empire* and *Super Jedi*."

For *Super Empire Strikes* back, the initial platform stages on Hoth added an extra dimension of difficulty due to the slippy-slidey nature of the planet's icy terrain. "This was our first attempt to add a 'slippery' factor to gameplay," Kalani comments. "It was difficult to test because of the many ways to slide into objects and assure proper collision. We also had to work hard on making the tiling of ice pieces look organic and not too repetitive. I enjoyed all the levels and am glad we added Han Solo and Chewie throughout these levels." However, these stages, along with some of the more sprawling, hazard-filled levels and increasingly fearsome bosses of both sequels, still attract criticism over their degree of difficulty, despite the addition of level passcodes.

"I get that a lot," chuckles Kalani. "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! I definitely could not deliver such difficult games today. In hindsight, I would reduce the enemy damage by 10-20 per cent, make the player character able to absorb more damage, add more power-ups and improve level design. Though I wouldn't want to make it too easy – it has to be challenging. The player needs to feel like they are earning the Force. My excuse for the difficulty of those games in Yoda's words is: 'You are not a Jedi yet. Much training you will need!'"

Overall, Kalani tells us that there really isn't that much he would change about his SNES gaming trilogy in hindsight. "I'm very happy how the games turned out," he admits. "We did an incredible job getting this trilogy out back-to-back each Christmas. There are a couple of elements I wish we could have incorporated if we would have had more time, such as all the levels, characters and bosses we had to cut from the game – with each game we built more levels than we actually shipped. I'd also make the games a bit easier to play. I'm very fond of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy and very pleased with its popularity. They were my very first games and we had such fun designing and developing them."



» [SNES] A mysterious masked bounty hunter causes havoc in the halls of Jabba's Palace...

> "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then!"

**RG** thought it might be fun to ask Kalani if, like us, he had any favourites out of the many memorable *Star Wars* moments found across the trilogy. "There are so many favourite moments," he replies. "A lot of them had to do with gameplay as well as the technical challenges they presented. In *Super Star Wars* my favourites are the landspeeder and trench run levels. In *Super Empire* it's definitely the snowspeeder/ AT-AT level. Who doesn't

## WHAT THE PRESS SAID

"THERE'S A MINI *Star Wars* revival on right now, bringing with it lots of good things – books, a fab comic, one brilliant PC game (*X-Wing*) and this, not only the best film game on the SNES, but a real contender for best of its type on any system."
**SUPER STAR WARS IMPORT REVIEW, SUPER PLAY, FEBRUARY 1993**

"TAKING ONLY MINOR liberties with the plot of the film, *Super Star Wars* is a milestone in movie tie-ins which shows just how this type of game should be done. The best soundtracks and spot effects ever heard on the SNES combine with graphics and stunning cut sequences to recreate a real feeling of playing the movie."
**NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM, FEBRUARY 1993**






» [SNES] *Super Empire Strikes Back* puts you behind the controls of the iconic Millennium Falcon for the first time.













» [SNES] You too can control a hyperactive four-foot teddy bear.

want to take down and AT-AT? That was incredibly difficult, but we managed to pull it off. One of my favourite levels is also the Carbonite Freezing Chamber playing as Chewbacca. You had to keep moving and were fighting jet troopers, stormtroopers with shields and bombs, various bounty hunters and the little pesky Ugnaughts. The Darth Vader levels were also a treat. It's so emotional going up against Vader no matter how pixelated he looked. By this time the player had all of the different Forces accessible and Luke was at his most powerful. Jon Knowles, my animation supervisor, did an awesome job animating Darth with the limited sprites we had available."

"In *Super Jedi* it's definitely the Rancor. It's the biggest beast in the *Star Wars* universe, and so satisfying when you take it down. The sail-barge level was also exciting. For the first time we could create and show what the sail-barge looked like on the outside and inside. In addition, we were able to go up against a slew of bounty hunters and strange creatures. And you got to play Princess Leia with her chain weapon in a bikini! Then of course there are the final levels flying the Falcon inside the Death Star. The climax of the entire trilogy racing to the core and back out in the nick of time blasting the Death Star into a million pieces. Finally, the showdown with the Emperor was a fun level to design. The difficulty was in creating the scene with the round window. It took a lot of tiles to look right. And then giving the Emperor all of his lightning effect powers…"

Before his departure from LucasArts earlier this year, *Force Unleashed* producer Haden Blackman stated that he would have loved to see a modern revival of the *Super Star Wars* series. We wonder if Kalani would be game.

"Definitely, I'd be all over that project," Kalani enthuses. "It's the game that catapulted LucasArts into the console space and it can do it again on the new platforms. I've been trying to convince LucasArts to recreate the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for tablets, handhelds or Xbox Live Arcade/PSN. If given that opportunity I'd keep the essence of the original, though reinvent and innovate the game with today's gameplay mechanics, give it a visual facelift and, of course, pack it with even more *Star Wars* goodies including additional environments, characters, bosses and vehicles from the movie. I'd also add a mode where players can create additional content to the game, like *LittleBigPlanet*. Maybe readers could start petitioning LucasArts for a new *Super Star Wars* series on the new platforms. I'm totally up for it, and it will be even better than the original…"

## SETTLE A SCORE

THE SUPERB RENDITION of the *Star Wars* theme music featured on the title screen of all three games in the trilogy was a feature that surprised Kalani as much as the rest of us. "We had an incredible audio technician on the team," he says. "I remember when I heard the *Star Wars* theme in the game for the first time. I literally said, 'Oh myGod, how did he do this and fit it on the SNES cartridge? It sounds identical to the movie!' It was incredible to hear it in the game and I was literally blown away. Hats off to Paul Webb at Sculptured for his dedication and passion in creating the best movie music score on the SNES. I still get comments today that the Super Nintendo score is the best on any console!"


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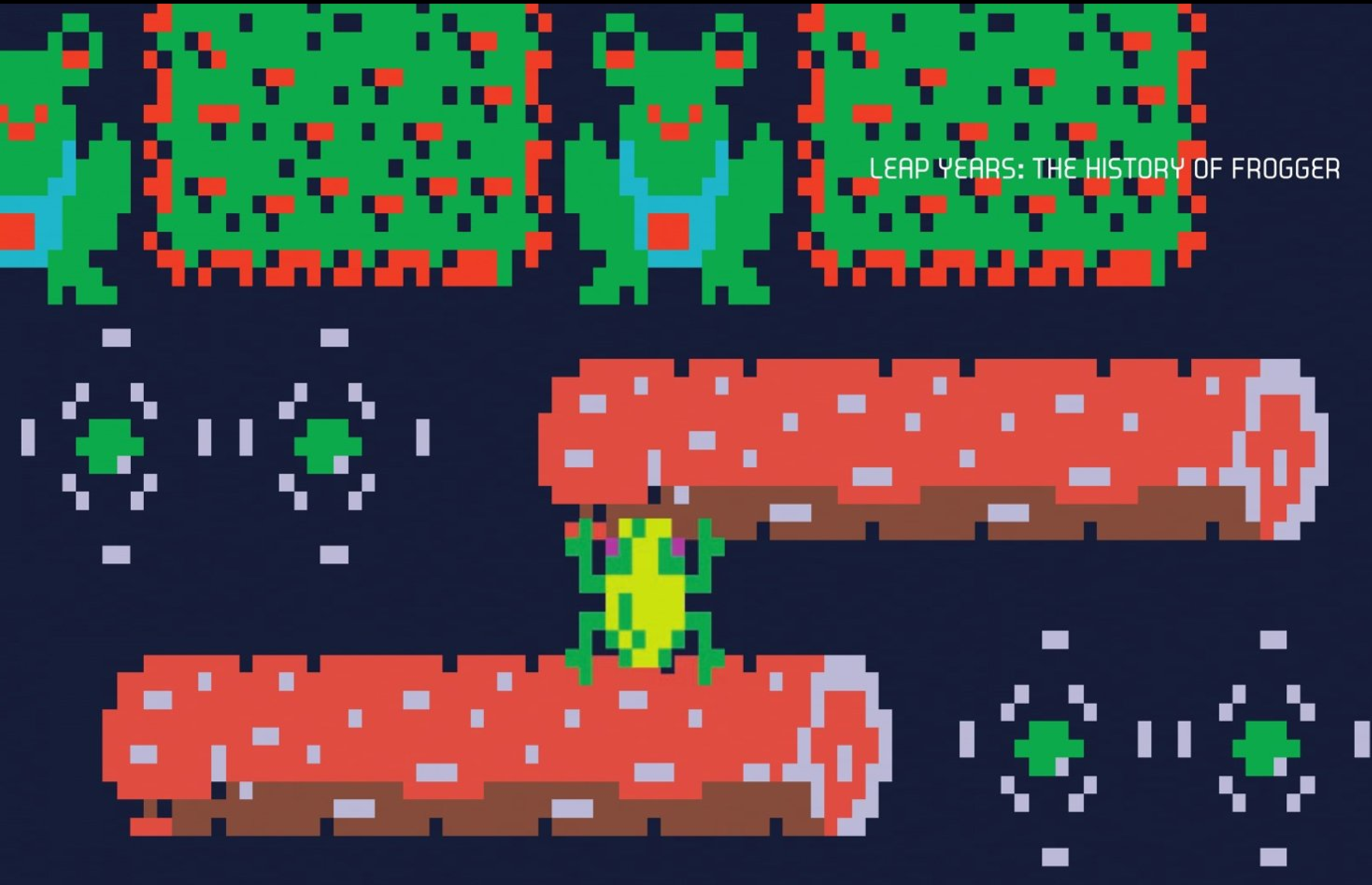
# Leap Years: The history of FROGGER

KONAMI STRUCK GREEN OIL IN 1981 WITH A COIN-OP ABOUT A FROG THAT STRUGGLED TO SWIM BUT WAS CLEVER ENOUGH TO EXECUTE THE GREEN CROSS CODE BETTER THAN DAVID PROWSE. CELEBRATING ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR, RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT THE FROGGER SERIES. WE GUARANTEE IT'LL BE RIBBETING

**The exact moment we entered the golden age of videogames is often debated. Many place the entry point around the early Eighties, pinpointing 1981 as the exact date, and this is because 1981 was a great year for games. It marked the release of some of the most classic, revered and popular coin-ops ever created, but it also represented an important turning point for the medium. While hugely popular 1980 games such as *Missile Command* and *Defender* – landmark shooters with challenging gameplay and unique controls to test the skills of experienced gamers – showed us how far games had come, 1981 showed us where videogames were heading: a colourful era of original titles designed to be accessible to everyone, of any age and ability.**

Moving away from these stern themes of space, racing and shooting, many arcade games began exhibiting quirkier gameplay and colourful cartoon graphics. As a result, new demographics began playing them, and this, in turn, fuelled their popularity and profitably further. *Pac-Man* is largely credited for kicking off this trend in 1980, its eating theme famously selected by its creator, Toru Iwatani, because he felt food was something that would appeal to female gamers.

Even with this in mind, to say it puzzles the brain why *Frogger* became such a massive hit back in the day is a fair question. *Frogger*'s premise hardly sounds the most exciting of videogame scenarios: help a frog cross a dangerous stretch of five-lane motorway and then negotiate an equally perilous



stretch of croc-infested river. It basically boils down to helping a frog cross the road. The original title with which Konami wanted to christen *Frogger*, before the game's publisher, Sega, intervened and saved the day, does a pretty good job of explaining how dull a concept that could quite easily have been: *Highway Crossing Frog*.

But *Frogger* was anything but boring. The playing field was an ever-shifting grid of obstacles and danger, and the assured grid-based movement was simple and uncomplicated. It was a game that required good timing and judgement more than dexterity, and that made it accessible to beginners and gamers of any skill. Moreover, being responsible for one of the diminutive green creatures, as odd as it sounds, may have also contributed to its success, as it offered a more emotional attachment for players. When a ship blows up in a videogame, you are saved the sight of the inside of the painful coffin of fire and crumpled, molten metal for the poor virtual pilot. In *Frogger*, you couldn't escape the grim effects of your actions; collision with a speeding hunk of metal resulted in dead frogs and you left feeling the effects of your failings as you witnessed the really quite abstract death animation, which showed your frog turn into a bloated purple ball before finally becoming a pee-coloured skull and crossbones.

As videogames grew in popularity throughout the Eighties, so videogame merchandising began appearing, and *Frogger*'s success made it an obvious target. The slippery green star got his own board game courtesy of Milton Bradley, which was actually a fairly decent replication of the videogame, as well as a record by musical duo Buckner & Garcia titled *Froggy's Lament*. It featured on their 1982 concept album *Pac-Man Fever* and contained the inspired lyrics: 'Froggy takes one step at a time. The way that he moves has no reason or rhyme.'

Frogger the character appeared on US telly too, alongside fellow gaming celebrities Donkey Kong, Q*Bert, and Pitfall Harry, all of which starred together in the 1983 CBS-produced animated show *Saturday Supercade*. In the show, Frogger spoke and was portrayed as a newspaper reporter who had to venture out looking for decent news stories while under constant pressure from his boss.

But while *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* garnered similar levels of pop culture attention, one thing separating *Frogger* from its peers is that it didn't receive an arcade follow-up. Well, not straight away. Instead he got a late 1984 home sequel by way of *Frogger II: ThreeeDeep!*, which was released for the ColecoVision, Atari 2600, 5200 and C64.

*Frogger II: ThreeeDeep!* stuck close to the formula of the arcade original, but its level design was slightly more abstract. Clearly its designers were struggling to think up ways to add variety to *Frogger*'s simple dodge-the-traffic concept, and this resulted in a schizophrenic trio of levels that contradicted their own set of rules. For instance, the first stage, which the manual explains is set underwater, saw Frogger able to move freely in water while avoiding contact with fish and alligators in order to safely reach the logs at the top of the screen. On the second stage, water became deadly again, and our hero is now inexplicably able to hitch a ride on the same alligators he had to avoid in the first stage as he tries to hop aboard a rubber dinghy that is being towed by a tugboat. The final stage is the wackiest of

them all. Set in the clouds, it sees Frogger trying to hop through the sky, avoiding birds and dragons. We won't even try to get our heads around why he would be doing this.

After a long absence from gaming, *Frogger* finally resurfaced in arcades. *Ribbit!*, which was released by Sega in 1991 to celebrate the series' tenth anniversary and marked its final arcade outing – unless you count the *Frogger* ticket-redemption machine released by Eugene Jarvis's company, Raw Thrills, last year. The notable thing separating the gameplay of *Ribbit!* and its arcade parent is the fact that the objective changed focus to helping Frogger eat up all the flies, wasps and sometimes even crabs that appear on screen. The stages now took the form of single-screen arenas while the gameplay had more of a mini-game vibe to it – one level, for instance, sees you collecting fish while being cautious of getting drowned by waves lapping against the shore. Apart from this, it was classic *Frogger* gameplay all the way.

Taking another giant leap between subsequent releases, 1997 saw the release of the next title. Released on the PC and PlayStation, *Frogger* was a neat 3D revamp of the original, featuring a nice angular art style and gameplay that served up a real challenge for experienced players. The next year and *Frogger* made a peculiar backwards leap to the Genesis and SNES. Despite coming enshrouded in the same PSone *Frogger* box art, all the games differed. Genesis owners received a decent port of the original 1981 arcade game, which, pushing 17 years old by this point, likely went down with the kids like garlic-flavoured dog burps, while Super Nintendo owners received a colourful revamp of the original. The games do hold the honour, though, of being among the very last released for both 16-bit consoles.



» [GBA] If you like *Frogger* to have a story and play like a bad *Zelda* clone, you can't go far wrong with *The Forgotten Relic*.

As we waved a final farewell to the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo, so CD-ROM-based consoles and PC gaming came further to the fore. The PlayStation *Frogger* remake was quite a big success for its publisher, Hasbro – according to some sources, it shifted over 3 million copies in the US, outselling hits like *Driver* and *PaRappa The Rapper* – so as a result a sequel was duly greenlit. Of course, realising that it couldn't really resell the revamped *Frogger* concept again so quickly, Hasbro, with the help of Blitz Games, came up with a new direction for the series.

The result was *Frogger 2: Swampy's Revenge*, a sequel that melded the look of a 3D platformer with the classic dodge-the-hazards gameplay. The main aim was to successfully get Frogger to the end of each stage in as fast a time as possible, with a second goal to save five baby frogs scattered around each stage – a concept that was first applied to the sadly unreleased *Frogger* prototype for the Game Gear. The levels had a single clear route through, similar in approach to a board game, but the path was loaded with dangers and obstacles to avoid. Many of the stages also referenced popular culture – one minute you're helping Frogger escape *Indiana Jones*-style booby traps; the next to dodge obstructions and enemies in a luminous, *Tron*-style level.

> **"Frogger II: ThreeeDeep! sees Frogger trying to hop through the sky, avoiding birds and dragons"**

In 2000, the same year as *Swampy's Revenge* was released, Konami also put out the Game Boy Color sequel *Frogger 2*, a solid follow-up that served up more classic *Frogger* gameplay. The most notable aspect of the game is it allows players to swap control between Frogger and his girlfriend Lily, although neither seems to have any unique attribute beyond their appearance. As well as this,

## Forgotten Froggers

**A couple of lesser-known Frogger games to find release, and one that didn't**



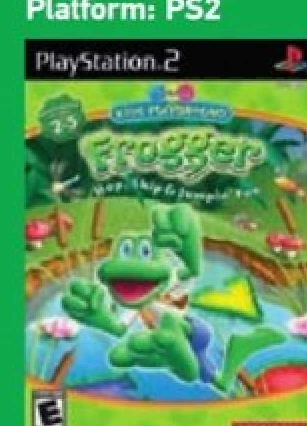

### KONAMI COLLECTOR'S SERIES: ARCADE ADVANCED

**Platform: GBA**

Two versions of *Frogger* can be found on this arcade compilation. It comes with a straight arcade port, which differs by featuring a slight bit of scrolling to cram the vertical screen action onto the GBA's display, and a cartoon revamp hidden away but unlocked by inputting the famous Konami code (up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A) on the game menu. The new version looks really nice, but the odd side-on perspective takes a bit of getting used to and doesn't offer the clearest way to plan your dash to your solace.

### KONAMI KIDS PLAYGROUND: FROGGER HOP, SKIP & JUMPIN' FUN

**Platform: PS2**




Enforcing the belief that *Frogger* was becoming a franchise that Konami was trying to mould into something to appeal to the Mr Tumble crowd is this unusual PS2 release. This title is effectively a series of colourful mini-games set against pictures of *Frogger*, or a swamp. Clearly it was designed to eke some additional worth from the dance mat peripheral released for the PS2 ports of Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution* series. If you really, really like *Frogger*, and really, really like that dance mat peripheral, and are around six years old, then you might garner some enjoyment from it.

### FROGGER PROTOTYPE

**Platform: Game Gear**

Falling victim to the Sega licence expiring, this wonderful sequel sadly never saw official release. That's a shame, as it would have been the first sequel to do something really interesting with the concept. Here you help Frogger scoot around, rescuing your fellow frogs and returning them to their home at the base of the screen. In essence, it's the *Frogger* equivalent of *Dead Rising*, except it's more entertaining and the computer-controlled frogs are far more intelligent than the dribbling, brainless shoppers you must escort to safety against the throng of dribbling, braindead shoppers.



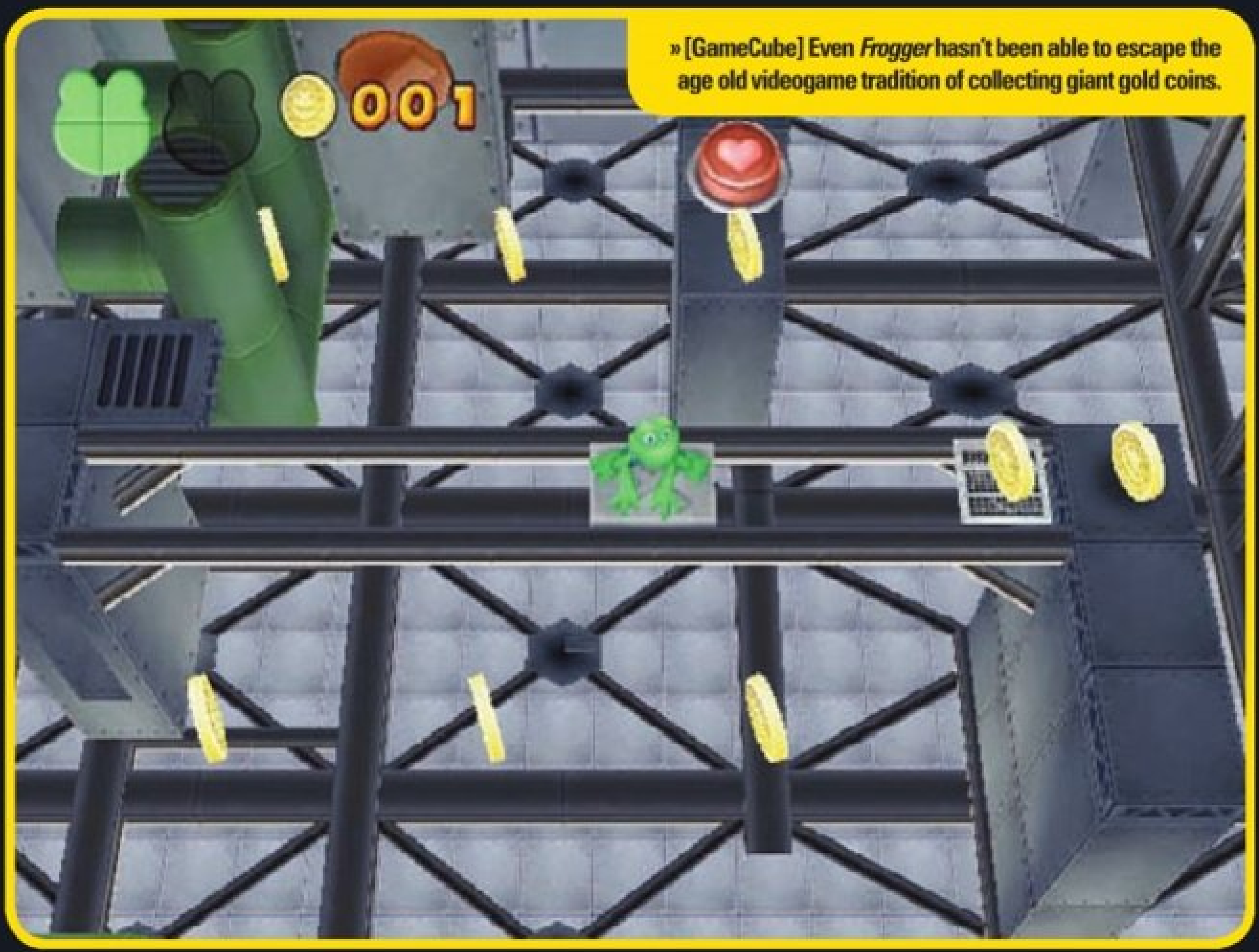
» [Arcade] *Ribbit!* is a unique play on *Frogger*'s gameplay. It's also the only game we know of that mixes frogs with cogs.



a secondary optional goal was introduced to the gameplay in the form of collecting diamond pick-ups scattered around the stages, adding a bit of replay value to proceedings.

In 2001, Konami introduced a spin-off series called *Frogger's Adventures*. Three games make up the series and all share pretty similar gameplay. The first two were GBA exclusives, *Temple Of The Frog* (2001) and *The Lost Wand* (2002), while the third and final episode, *The Rescue* (2003), appeared on the GameCube, PC and PS2.

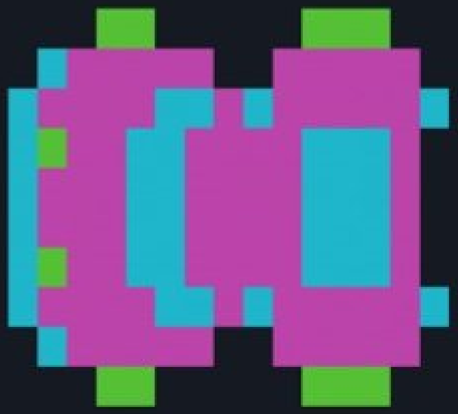
The GBA titles were bright, colourful, top-down platform/puzzle games clearly aimed at kids, despite the fact that they were pretty challenging. Their gameplay required players to study the levels and note the motion of moving platforms and fixed patrols of enemies to carefully nudge Frogger to safety, while stage completion in *Temple Of The Frog* rested on collecting a number of elementals, an idea that was dropped for the sequel. The stages in both games were all themed, tied together with a passable story: in *Temple Of The Frog*, Frogger has to hop through various stages based around four elements to save his swamp, and in *The Lost Wand* he must find the scattered shards of a wand by visiting magical worlds. Boss fights in *The Lost Wand* were also introduced. Well, categorising them as fights is a stretch, as they're more neat timing challenges for Frogger, with tasks such as stealing a shard of wand using his sticky telescopic tongue from a dozing dragon as squawking birds try to disturb him. In *The Rescue*, the concept and gameplay follows a similar path, but appearing on more powerful machines naturally means it looks better. Its level design also leant slightly more towards puzzle-solving than simply dodging obstacles and enemies.

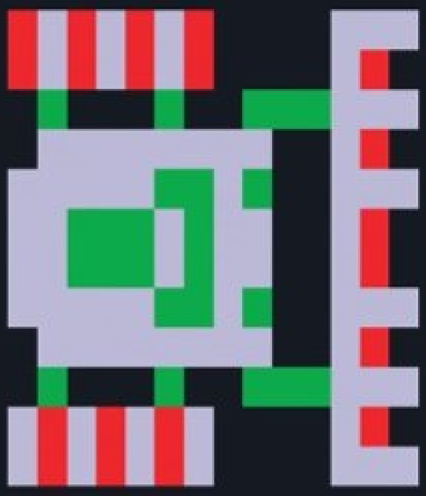


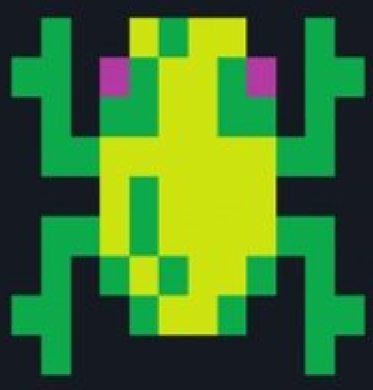
» [GameCube] Even *Frogger* hasn't been able to escape the age old videogame tradition of collecting giant gold coins.

In the same year that *The Rescue* was released, Konami could be seen to further experiment with the *Frogger* franchise, but it was to forgettable effect. The genre-hopping began with the side-on GBA platformer *Frogger Advance: The Great Quest*, a side-scrolling platform game that bore a very, very loose visual likeness to the *Donkey Kong Country* games – it has similar 3D-ish character models, though not as pretty. Add forgettable peripheral characters to converse with, and our hero acquiring a few new skills during his quest, such as an awkward double jump and the ability to puff his chest up to float gracefully from jumps, and it's your standard platform game starring an anthropomorphic animal. *Frogger Advance: The Great Quest* isn't terrible, just terribly average, but it is notable for being the first *Frogger* game to shun the grid-based movement of previous games.

In spite of sharing a similar title and the same plot – Frogger is looking for a princess to rescue so he can force his lips on her on the off chance that he might turn into a handsome prince – the PS2 and PC game *Frogger: The Great Quest*, released the following year, was a completely different game. It was a 3D platform/adventure romp that saw our amphibian hero doing a bad *Mario 64*/*Banjo-Kazooie* impression, complete with collect quests, power-ups, boss battles and forgettable sub-characters. Sadly,





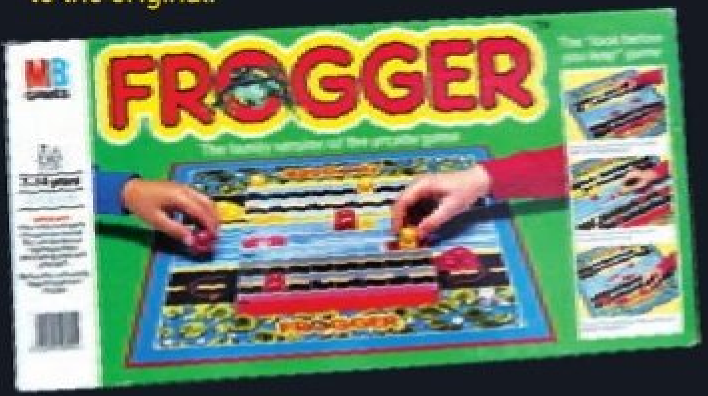


# Frogger in Hopular Culture

Such was its popularity, following its release Frogger soon found itself as the focus of cameo appearances, references and merchandise. We take a look at our favourites

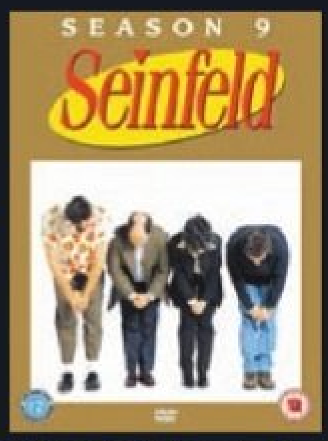
## MERCHANDISE

**As well as** *Donkey Kong* and *Defender* (also released in 1981), Milton Bradley released a board game adaptation of *Frogger*. If you missed our videogame board game feature in issue 93, it's a versus game that sees two players racing to get three frogs from their side of the board to their opponent's. With logs and traffic to negotiate, it's pretty faithful to the original.



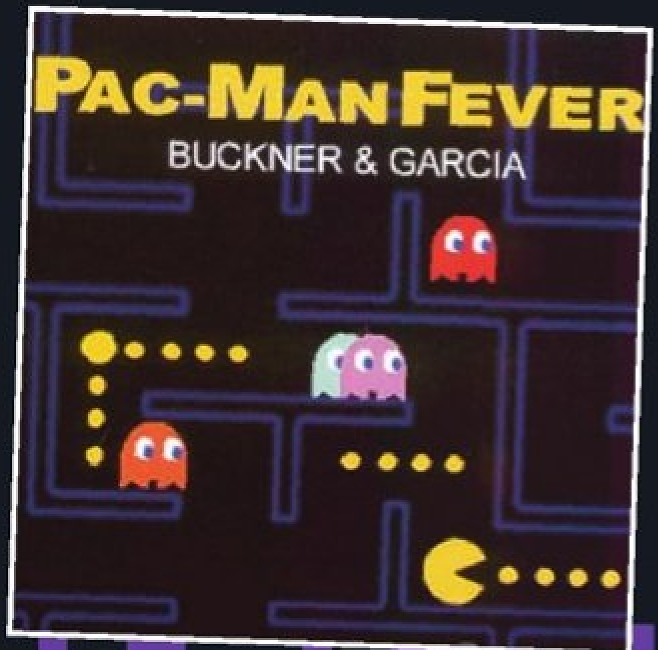

## TELEVISION

**An episode of** the hit US show *Seinfeld* featured an episode entitled 'The Frogger'. In it, George is trying to purchase a *Frogger* arcade machine from a shuttering pizzeria. The problem is he set the high score years ago, and is concerned that if he unplugs the machine it will be wiped. The episode ends, appropriately, with the machine getting destroyed by a truck as he tries to cross the road with it.




## MUSIC

**Musicians Buckner & Garcia** were inspired by *Frogger* when writing their song *Froggy's Lament*. It appeared on their videogame-inspired concept album, *Pac-Man Fever*. Michael Jackson also owned a *Frogger* arcade machine, and it was one of the many cabinets that went up for auction just before his death.



repetitive, moss-shaded levels and clunky controls make it a pretty dreary experience and not a patch on the games that it's clearly trying to imitate. It is great, however, if you ever want to find out how many different shades of green there are.

Possibly coming to realise that allowing Frogger to move freely took away much of what made the character unique – after all, frogs hop to get around, and what they don't do is get up on their hind legs and walk off on adventures – the next release, *Frogger Beyond*, reverted back to methodical platform gameplay and simple nudge controls. Taking place over eight distinct worlds, *Frogger Beyond* saw Frogger coming of age and having to endure some kind of deadly rite of passage. It's an passable sequel, better than *The Great Quest*, and introduced a smattering of new power-ups to keep things interesting, including Ghost Frog (invisibility), Feeding Frenzy (allows him to eat his foes) and the imaginatively titled Speed Up (which, uh… sped him up a bit).

It's at this point we start getting into some murky waters for the *Frogger* series. In 2003 the GBA got its final *Frogger* game in the form of *Frogger's Journey: The Forgotten Relic*, a top-down *Zelda*-esque RPG with tenuous links to the series. It baffles the brain why Konami felt the need to release a *Frogger* RPG, especially considering that one of the worst aspects about the previous story-based games was their actual stories. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that a *Frogger* game with a main focus on telling a story fails hard. Clearly trying to return to the Frogger the adventurer scenario that came to the fore in *The Great Quest*, *Frogger's Journey* looks nice but ultimately doesn't feel like a *Frogger* game, and so the association feels a tiny bit cynical.

In 2005, the *Frogger* series was entrusted to Hudson Soft – not a bad fit, too, considering that the company created the *Bomberman* series, which if you stop and think about it isn't a million miles away from the grid-based gameplay of *Frogger*. But in spite of this magical on-paper pairing, *Frogger: Ancient Shadow* was a disappointment. Released on the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube, it's basically a similar game to the *Frogger's Adventures* series, as it uses a control scheme very close to that of *The Lost Wand* – essentially, you use the shoulder buttons to turn your frog on the spot, while jabbing the D-pad nudges him forward one square. However, while this similar control setup worked quite well in a top-down 2D playing field, it just becomes overly complicated and frustrating when coupled with an additional dimension and the game's twitch, timing-based gameplay. Wrestling with controls and witnessing death repeatedly as a result, this is one to avoid. And if you want to see just what a bad job *Ancient Shadow* does with the *Frogger* legacy, Hudson kindly included the 1981 original on the disc as a bonus to show you.



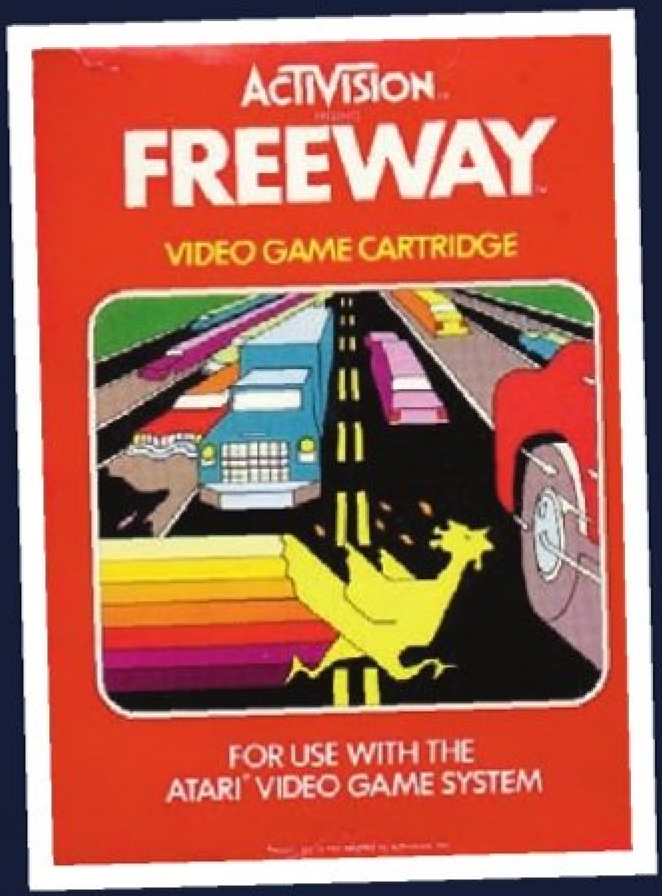
The previous *Frogger's Adventures* series of GBA games contained moments of fun and entertainment, and so the release of the DS marked a perfect new platform for *Frogger* to emigrate to. Konami certainly thought so, wasting no time in getting the series onto the handheld in 2005, the same year it was released in Europe.

The first DS and PSP release in the series was the terribly named *Frogger: Helmet Chaos* and was basically another *Frogger's Adventures*-style affair, but with prettier 3D visuals and more imaginative and larger levels. It also contained a neat 3D remake of the original arcade game that played across the console's dual screens, allowing the verticality of the arcade original.

**"The Great Quest is good if you ever want to find out how many shades of green there are"**

This was followed up with *My Frogger Toy Trials* the next year. As if its name and box art wasn't a giveaway, it was clearly aimed at kids. It does, however, have a

## Which came first: the chicken or the frog?




PRODUCED INDEPENDENTLY AND released the same year as *Frogger*, David Crane's Atari 2600 game *Freeway* is often compared to the traffic-dodging classic, owing to its striking similarities: in *Freeway* your task is to help chickens safely cross ten lanes of traffic. We contacted David to ask him where he found inspiration for *Freeway*, and his thoughts on its similarities with *Frogger*.

"There are many similarities between *Frogger* and *Freeway*. Because of these similarities, I am often asked which came first. In other words: who copied who?

"The simple answer is neither. These two games were developed in secure laboratories 6,000 miles apart, right around the same time frame. So why the similarities? They likely share a similar genesis.

"Ideas for videogames come from many sources. Some spring whole from the strange minds of game creators – to support this I offer *A Boy And His Blob* and his vitamin-depleted planet of Blobolonia – but many come from a game designer's personal experiences.

"The germ for *Freeway* came at [CES] in Chicago. To save a $10 parking fee, a guy had parked a mile from the convention centre, scaled a chainlink fence, and dodged across ten lanes of traffic on Lake Shore Drive. I saw him as he darted in front of the bus I was riding. I remarked aloud to my seat-mate: 'Now there's an idea for a videogame!'

"I developed the game soon after, inspired by the gameplay of one of the earliest electronic games ever created: *Space Race* by Al Alcorn. My game had two men competing to get from the bottom of the screen to the top through ten lanes of traffic, as many times as possible in about two minutes. Three days before the game was to be announced to the public at the next CES trade show, Activision CEO Jim Levy suggested: 'If you change it to a chicken, I could hire someone to wear a chicken suit and run around the convention to advertise the game. Besides, it would also fit the 'why did the chicken cross the road?' joke.' For that reason alone, overnight it went from being a man to an animal, although avid collectors can still find a version of the game showing the man.

"So what was the inspiration for *Frogger*? I have never been told. But is it hard to imagine the game's creator noticing a frog crossing a crowded sidewalk or bike path, trying to reach a lake or pond? Seems likely to me."



stab at the most original story in the series. The meat of the game sees you controlling a young boy who buys a mail-order pet. Expecting to receive something cool, like a chainsaw-wielding puma or a laser-spitting baboon with an armour-plated arse, he's a bit disappointed when a modest little frog arrives instead. What follows is a *Pokémon*-alike tale whereby the boy and his frog participate in a series of challenges against other pet owners. This is bolstered with a smattering of mini-games designed to make use of the DS's touch and microphone functions, including a *Super Monkey Ball*-style game that lets you steer your frog using the touch screen and race across water by blowing into the microphone to propel your frog to the finish line.

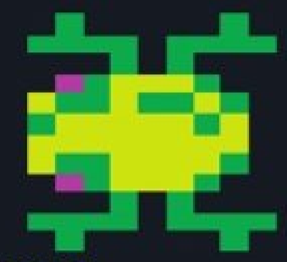
The current hardware generation has seen a fair bit of *Frogger* activity. The confusingly titled 2008 sequel *Frogger 2* was released on Xbox Live Arcade and, as its title implies, was a sort of extremely late arcade-style sequel to the original coin-op game. Visually it is saccharine in game form, but the gameplay sticks close to the original. It also offers a few neat multiplayer modes, including a genius one that allows you and a mate to go head-to-head to complete a stage in the fastest time. A separate downloadable *Frogger* game, *Frogger Returns*, was also released for PSN, WiiWare and DSiWare in 2009. It was essentially an affair in the same vein as PSone *Frogger*, but spoilt by twitchy controls, ropey visuals, a soundtrack of tedious lift music, and an odd elevated behind-the-frog perspective that made it difficult to judge your leaps.

When *Frogger* turned 30 this year, Konami celebrated by releasing a flurry of new games. This included the fun iOS and Facebook game *Frogger Pinball*, a surprisingly good virtual pinball game serving up a small selection of tables themed on *Frogger* staples; and a more traditional iOS offering in *Frogger Decades*. The latter was an entertaining sequel split across ten levels, divvied up between a selection of themed worlds, with the simple objective of getting Frogger safely from start to finish by avoiding obstacles and dangers one tile at a time. The levels in the game slowly auto-scroll, adding slightly to the tension, and there's also a neat endurance mode to see how far players can reach in a never-ending stage. *Decades* was followed by the recent *Frogger 3D* for the 3DS. We've yet to get our hands on the game as it hasn't been released in Europe at the time of writing, but the critical reaction so far to the US and Japanese releases hasn't filled us with confidence. It seems to use the same lame behind-the-frog perspective used in *Frogger Returns*, and adding a 3D filter to this – though you can, of course, opt to turn it off if it's particularly galling – is surely a recipe for frustration.

While the *Frogger* series has dipped its toe in different genre pools and admirably tried out new ideas to stop it from looking and feeling tired, looking back at the series shows that the very best entries have been those that get the basic appeal of *Frogger*: solid controls and simple, addictive gameplay with that 'one more go' quality in spades. That one of videogames' simplest concepts is still going after 30 years is an impressive achievement and a tribute to the lasting power of the golden age of gaming.

## The Frogger Basics

**Frogger is such a complicated game that we felt we really ought to break down its elements to explain this 1981 gaming minefield**



**Frogger**
This is our hero. Your ultimate goal is to get five of him home safely. He's green, can move in four directions, and that's pretty much it.



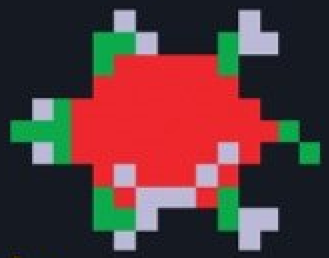
**Home**
This is your goal. Get your five frogs in within 60 seconds to finish the stage. Timing it so you arrive when a fly is inside will earn you extra points.



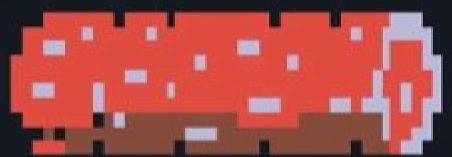
**Crocodiles**
These killing machines will either sit in Frogger's homes or hide in the water. Hitch a ride on their backs or watch for their gaping mouths.



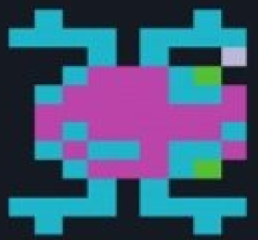
**Snakes**
First appearing on level 3, where they patrol the pavement and logs, snakes are deadly to Frogger and cannot be jumped over.



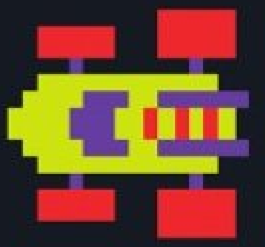
**Turtles**
Frogger can use the turtles as a temporary platform. Be careful, though, because they take umbrage by diving underwater.



**Logs**
These are your friends. Safe, dependable and solid, use them to gradually make your way across the treacherous water.



**Lady frog**
Look out for purple frog. She appears on the logs and will hitch a ride on Frogger's back to get home, earning you bonus points.



**Traffic**
This is the first danger Frogger has to negotiate. As the game progresses, the traffic starts to get denser and faster. This then loops every 5 stages.



» [GBA] Frog versus chicken. Is this a subtle reference to *Frogger* and the Atari 2600 game *Freeway*? We seriously doubt it.



» [PS2] If you want to know how boring Frogger's life is – which might explain why he risks his life crossing roads – then play *Frogger: The Great Quest*




# After bringing horror to the C64 with Forbidden Forest, Paul Norman decided to mix minigames with blood rituals for his next game. Paul Drury gets shot with an arrow and eaten by piranhas




## IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** COSMI
» **DEVELOPER:** PAUL NORMAN
» **PLATFORM:** C64
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **GENRE:** MEXICAN MINIGAMES

"Remember disco?" Paul Norman asks us in his deep Californian drawl.

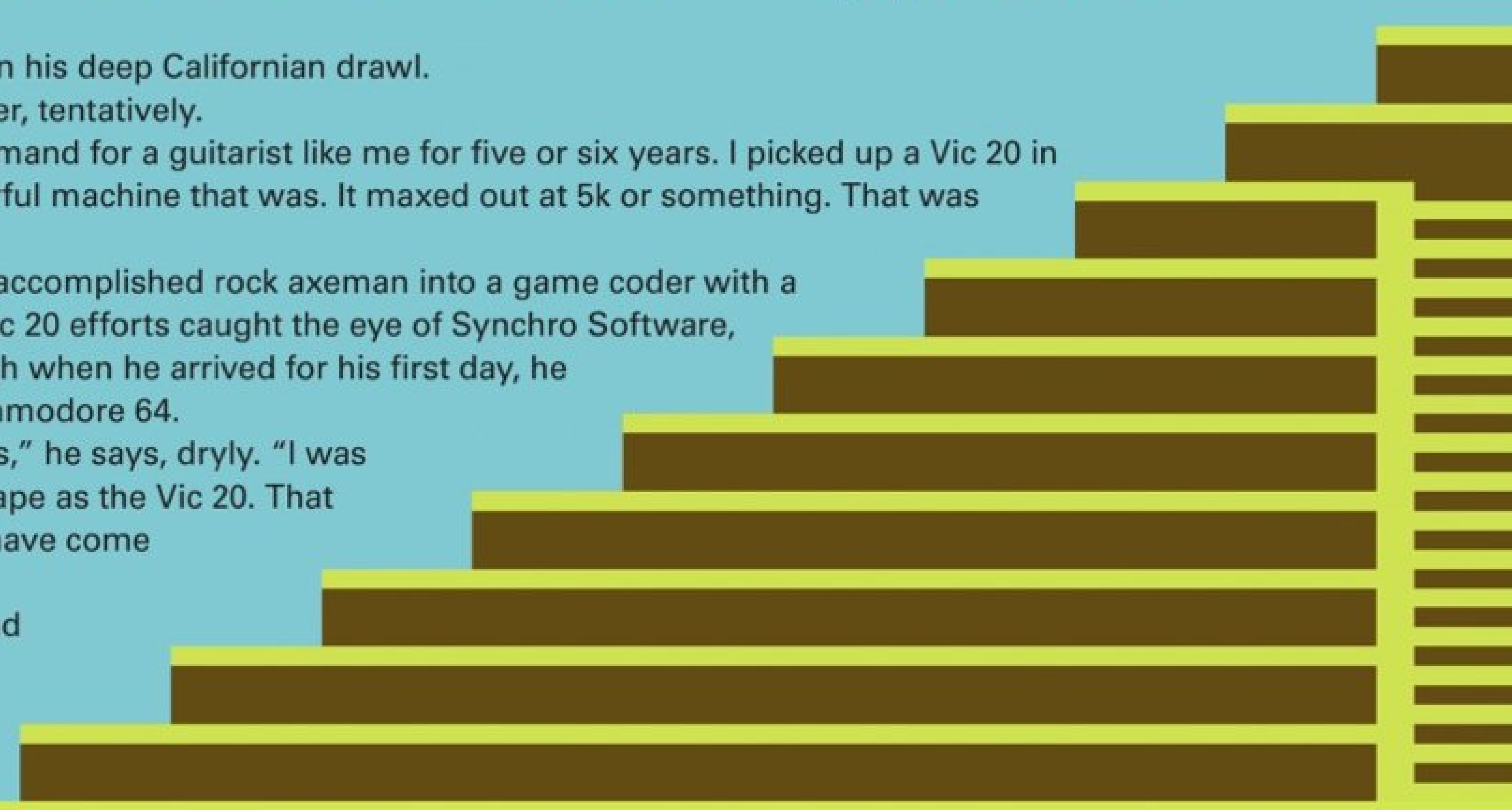
We've seen *Saturday Night Fever*, we offer, tentatively.

"Well, disco pretty much knocked the demand for a guitarist like me for five or six years. I picked up a Vic 20 in the summer of '82 for $300. What a wonderful machine that was. It maxed out at 5k or something. That was space age for the time!"

Thank you, John Travolta, for turning an accomplished rock axeman into a game coder with a style and rhythm all his own. Paul's early Vic 20 efforts caught the eye of Synchro Software, which duly offered him employment, though when he arrived for his first day, he found a surprise waiting on his desk: a Commodore 64.

"I thought I'd let it ride, see what happens," he says, dryly. "I was greatly relieved it was roughly the same shape as the Vic 20. That was encouraging. I mean, how far could it have come in a year?"

Unfazed, Paul opted to learn by doing, and taught himself how to programme on the new machine by creating the wonderfully



## Retro Gamer is proud to present a director's commentary on the seven scenes that comprise his small-screen epic…





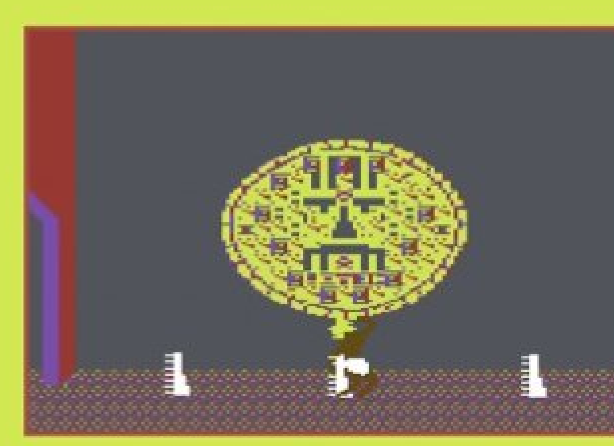
### Scene 1: The Gauntlet

The story begins with our loin-clothed hero running breathlessly towards a distant pyramid, leaping and ducking to avoid arrows thrown from endless rows of fellow Aztecs. Paul: "My first game, *Forbidden Forest*, had parallax scrolling so I wanted to see if I could get the Z-axis scrolling, like he's running into the screen. This is my favourite level and really, really hard. It caused me such incredible tension to get to the end, especially when I added this music that dragged you towards the pyramid. It was like sex. The tension really built up and then – BANG! – you made it!"



### Scene 2: The Stairs

Scaling the giant pyramid is especially taxing when some unseen sadist is raining down huge stone blocks on your head. Again, the pounding soundtrack not only adds to the tension, you can gauge how near you are to success by where you are in the song. Paul: "I started playing guitar at thirteen and the main *Aztec Challenge* theme is the first tune I ever composed. I finally found a use for it all those years later. When I was testing the game, I'd listen for the changes in the music and think, 'I'm gonna make it!' The piece is called 'Sea Of Dreams' or SOD for short." How apt.



### Scene 3: The Temple

Negotiating a continuous stream of surprise spikes, spiky pits and and falling spiky debris through this level's many deadly chambers is made trickier by the fact you are constantly sprinting headlong into danger. Paul: "I like to take a conventional idea and spin it 180 degrees. Normally, you push the joystick to do something. I thought, 'Let's make it so you have to push it to stop something happening.' I think this level is very funny. The way he whooshes down those pits so quickly has a Marx Brothers or Keystone Cops feel to it, and cracks me up every time."

## THE QUEEN IS DEAD

BACK IN 2003, Paul revisited the people of Mexica in the form of *Azteca Queen*, which adds bloody human sacrifice, groovy dancing and lots of flesh to those painfully tough minigames. "I did it to learn how to programme in Flash," explains Paul. "Why choose this one of my games? The nudity was an influence. It takes time to get those breasts just right, believe me." He also hints that he might yet return to the Aztec empire but in a different medium, having produced a 130-page film script. "They were a very advanced civilisation, completely denigrated by the Spanish," he sighs. "I did a lot of research. I'd like to see an accurate historical depiction of their story. Who knows… I know a few people but unfortunately everything in the film industry takes about ten years just to get to the discussion stage. Unless you're Justin Bieber." For more from the talented Mr Norman, see www.digittarius.com, and he'll be In The Chair some time next year.





## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**FORBIDDEN FOREST** (PICTURED)
**SYSTEMS:** C64
**YEAR:** 1983

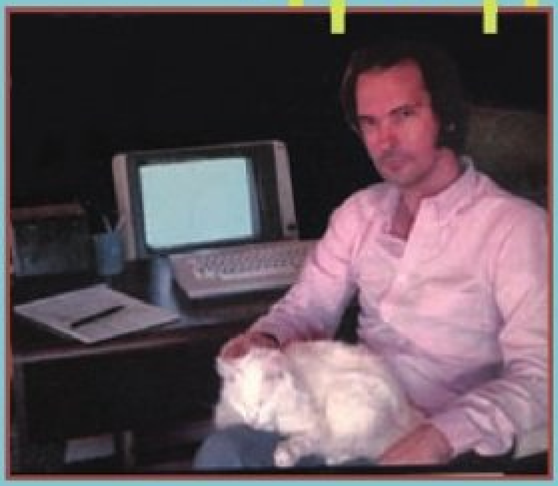
**CAVERNS OF KAFKA**
**SYSTEM:** C64
**YEAR:** 1984

**SUPER HUEY**
**SYSTEM:** C64
**YEAR:** 1985

atmospheric *Forbidden Forest*. Synchro had been taken over by Cosmi during the game's development and, after the positive reception given to his debut, his new bosses asked Paul to convert one of their Atari 400/800 titles to the C64. *Aztec Challenge* by Robert T. Bonifacio was a scrolling platformer in the *Mario Bros.* vein, and being an accommodating employee, Paul agreed to recreate it. "I said sure, why not, and then completely forgot about [the original] version. 'Aztec Challenge' was all I needed. I hadn't spent the last few years of my life going to arcades. I'd watched movies, played music. All I had in my mind was, what would the movie Aztec Challenge be like?"

**"All I had in my mind was, what would the movie Aztec Challenge be like?"**

**Paul took his inspiration from the silver screen, not the arcades.**

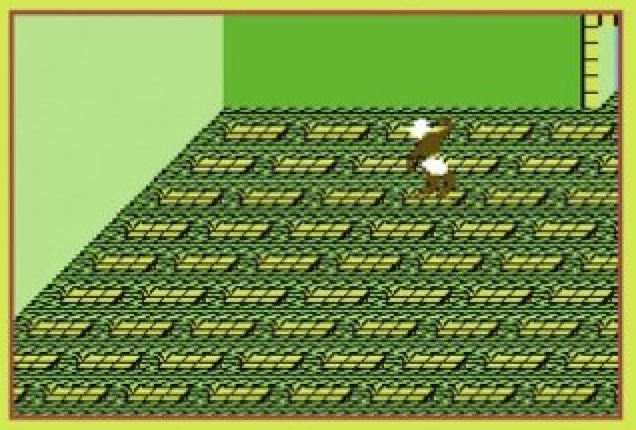


» [Paul and cat] Programmer Paul Norman and his feline coding companion



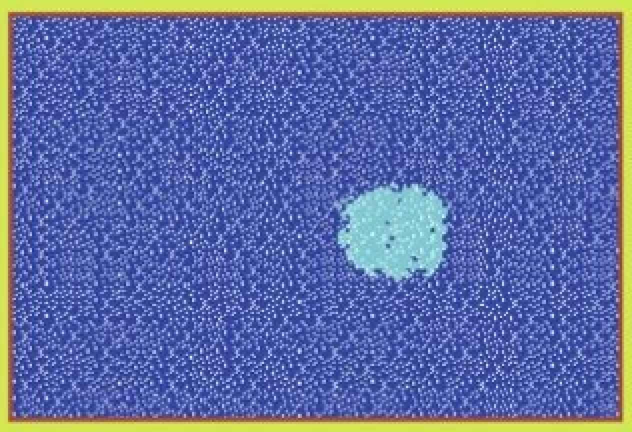
### Scene 4: The Vermin

We rather enjoy the respite of this fourth level, as after the nail-bitingly vicious opening trio, avoiding the swarms of scorpions, spiders and snakes is a far more forgiving experience. Paul: "I think I was running into the limitations of the overlaid sprite detection. If you passed two creatures at the same time, the code got confused as to what it was supposed to be detecting and you'd slip between them. I was coding in a freeform way. Everything was a learning experience. I wasn't going to tweak until I dropped! To use a music analogy, though, this level is like a filler track on an album."



### Scene 5: Hopaztec

In a total change of pace, you must carefully memorise a path to the exit, avoiding hidden pressure pads that trigger instant death by launching poisoned darts into your ears. Paul: "You gotta remember, I was sitting in the rec room of my house, just me, the C64 and a cat, thinking, What the hell am I gonna do now? You're in a temple, maybe you're gonna come across some booby traps. Sure, *Indiana Jones* was an influence and that film was an homage to a thousand previous films. That level was movies, the board game *Concentration* and 'what do I do next?', all rolled into one."



### Scene 6: Piranha

Escaping the confines of the temple, you plunge into a river, only to discover it's infested with hungry piranha. Get bitten by one of the blighters and the whole shoal swarms around our unfortunate Aztec and devours him in a gruesome feeding frenzy. Paul: "Wasn't that cool? It's kind of serene most of the time; everyone's just swimming along and then BAM! They hit him. Again, that's a laughs level. I found swimming across too difficult so I thought I'd give myself a little edge by adding in a dive button. None of this stuff is planned out on paper beforehand, you know what I'm saying?"



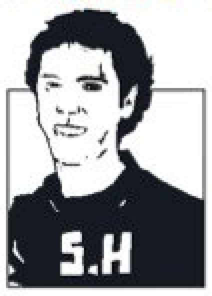
### Scene 7: The Bridge

Freedom beckons beyond a rickety bridge with missing slats, requiring swift reactions to judge each leap. Miscalculating a gap leads to a fall into the ravine. Paul: "Seeing him in mid-air is almost like a freeze-frame, like a *Road Runner* cartoon. Whoops, there he goes! I love this one. It's as tense as The Gauntlet but with the funny fast falling of The Temple." The rhythm of this level and the fretboard-like bridge make us think it's the spiritual ancestor to *Guitar Hero*. Are we stretching things too far, Paul? "That's not possible. You're doing exactly what I wanted you to do. You're making it yours."

# The Adventures Of Bond… Basildon Bond

## THE CHRISTMAS JOKE

» RETROREVIVAL




» PROBE ENTERTAINMENT LIMITED
» AMSTRAD CPC
» 1986

**As it's nearly Christmas, this month Darran and I thought that we'd share our most memorable gaming Christmases. Here's one of mine.**

As soon as we got our first family computer, an Amstrad CPC from Rumbelows, any disposable cash I acquired went straight onto treating it to games. I wasn't exactly subtle about my addiction, either – getting in from school, tossing my bag on the floor, grunting at my mum and then running upstairs to sit in front of my beloved CPC, where I remained until dinner was shouted. As such, looking back I'm surprised that there were always a couple of new games nestled under the tree to unwrap on Christmas morning, and my folks always seemed to take on board my unsubtle hints as to what game I really, really wanted that year.

This one particular year it was the *James Bond 007* Compilation I wanted. When C-Day finally came I unwrapped my presents and was shocked to find the last present at the bottom of my stocking was a game-shaped package not large enough to be a compilation pack. The next few moments I remember happening in slow motion. I looked down at the present, nervously unwrapped it and was horrified when I was greeted by an image of a goofy 'tached man in tights pulling a kung-fu pose in a television studio, and a small picture of someone whom I would later discover was television personality Russ Abbot.

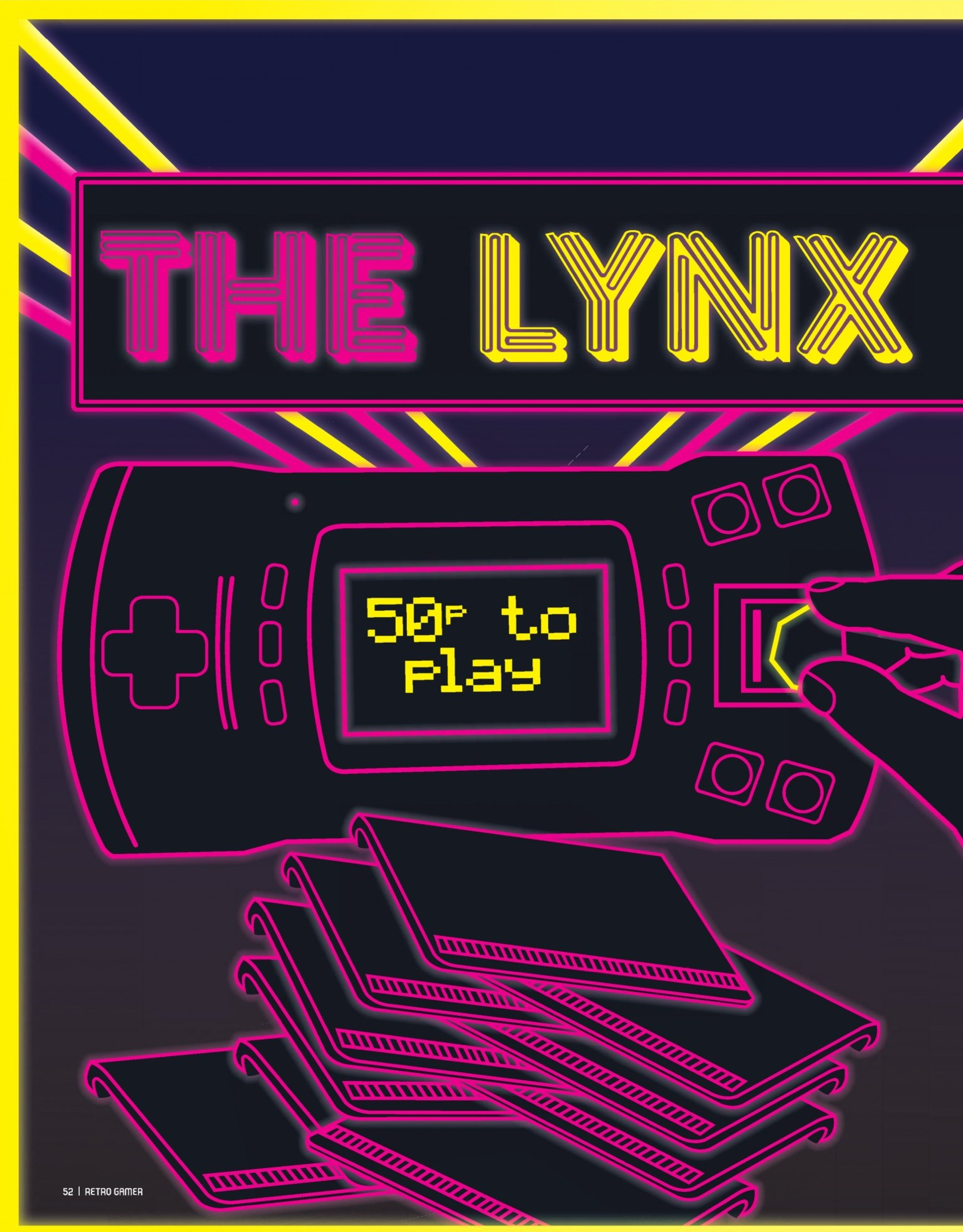
I didn't quite know how to react. I didn't want to seem ungrateful so later that morning loaded it up, trying to convince myself it couldn't possible be as bad as its box art made it look. As I suspected, it wasn't great, an *Impossible Mission* type affair but far, far less exciting. Tenuous links to the comedian it was endorsing came by way of having to matching up jokes to feed into a computer, with the ultimate goal to rescue Abbot from kidnappers. Ultimately, this wasn't anything James Bond would put his name too.

It was lucky then that it was all an elaborate joke thought up by my parents, the punchline of which was revealed to me when I visited my Nan later that day. It turns out she had purchased the compilation pack for me on the instruction of my dad. *

THERE IS NOTHING HERE!

YOU ARE CARRYING NOTHING.


TIME : 0.01.28
SCORE : 0000000
JOKES MATCHED 00
COOPERBLASTER 09


THE LYNX
50p to
play

# EFFECT

## The Atari Lynx was a marvellous little handheld that ported a silly number of exceedingly good arcade conversions. Retro Gamer speaks to former Atari Corporation developers to find out how the magic was achieved

**If there's one handheld that gets constantly derided by the uninformed, it is Atari Corporation's Lynx. Despite packing a graphical punch that could easily floor Nintendo's Game Boy, its sheer size, dismal lack of third-party support and prodigious battery consumption meant that it quickly became a forgotten footnote in the handheld war, loved today by only the hardcore, who continue to keep the scene alive through collecting and impressive homebrew projects.**

And yet, if you put your prejudices aside and start to dig around its games catalogue, you'll find a surprising number of genuinely great titles to enjoy. *Lemmings, Chip's Challenge, Blue Lightning* and *Todd's Adventures In Slime World* are all excellent games that any Lynx owner should add to their collection, while a thriving homebrew scene has delivered stunning efforts such as *Zaku* and the astonishingly good *Alpine Games*.

For many Lynx owners, though, the real draw of Atari Corp's machine was the sheer number of genuinely great arcade ports that were available for it. *Robotron: 2084, Rampart*, Rampage, *RoadBlasters* and *S.T.U.N. Runner* were superb ports that also wiped the floor with their peers, offering conversions that were of far higher quality than those on the Game Boy and Game Gear. Sure, Sega's console had the likes of *Space Harrier, OutRun* and *After Burner*, but why bother when they failed to capture the atmosphere and excitement of the real deal? The Lynx may not have been perfect, but the majority of its conversions were of a high standard, offering the closest experience to the arcades at the time, but all in the palm of your hand.

"The Lynx was a great machine for arcade ports because it had three strong characteristics going for it," recalls Jerome Strach, who, along with Eric Ginner, worked on ports of *Ms Pac-Man* and *Rampart*. "One: it had a very good resolution screen for its time. Two: it had a powerful SDK with a great debugger. Three: it was fast hardware, and with any arcade port, FPS is everything. The ability to manipulate sprites through hardware made it a powerful platform, empowering developers to accomplish some wonderful arcade effects with minimal effort."

D Scott Williamson, who not only coded excellent ports of *Toki, RoadBlasters* and *S.T.U.N. Runner* but was also head of Lynx development support, is in full agreement with Jerome about the machine's impressive technical capabilities. "It was perhaps the most innovative platform for its time," he explains. "Especially when you consider all the forward thinking that went into its tools and technologies and their relevance even in today's game hardware and development environments. The Lynx is one of my favourite all time platforms to develop for, which says a lot considering I've developed on the 2600, Lynx, Atari 400/800/ST/TT/STE, Game Boy, SNES, N64, GameCube, Wii, Genesis, PSX, PS2, PS3, Xbox, Xbox 360 and PC."

Greg Omi is also a big fan of the Lynx's hardware capabilities. He should know, as he was a part of the Lynx hardware project when it was still under development at Epyx. "I was actually on the development team for the Lynx over at Epyx," he tells us when we ask about his fantastic port of *Klax*. "When it was sold to Atari I worked as developer support, as well as porting *Klax*. I decided I was going to do digitised sound and had my friend Lx Rudis sample them. He was working with Tengen [Atari Games] on the NES and Genesis versions. I designed the stereo panning circuit on the Lynx II and Javier Solis implemented it. *Klax* was the very first game to use it. The Lynx was a great machine; because of the low pixel resolution we could redraw every pixel many times a frame – I think at least ten times – making things a breeze. It was the first game machine to have scaling sprites and a frame buffer. The weakest part was sound since [Lynx designer] Dave Needle hates sound. At least he made it possible to do digital samples, so I decided I was going to make the first sampled game for the Lynx. I had to get Atari to let me use a 256K cart, which was a huge deal at the time."

There was no denying that Atari Corp had built a powerhouse of a machine, but all the extra bells and whistles that the Lynx possessed meant it was far from cheap. We won't delve too deeply into the Lynx's history as a handheld console because it's already been covered in-depth in issue 43 of **Retro Gamer**, but suffice to say a high entry price and

# THE LYNX EFFECT

» [Lynx] In addition to boasting four-player action, *Rampage* (right) included an additional character, Larry the lab rat.










» [Lynx] *Pinball Jam* (left) was a port of two Williams pinball tables, *Elvira And The Party Monsters* and *Police Force*.

» [Lynx] *Battlezone 2000* (top left) featured similar graphics to the arcade game, but was otherwise brand new. The same is true for *Super Asteroids & Missile Command* (below), which is a cool double pack.




## Monkey Business

**NORMALLY WE WOULDN'T feature a new game that isn't based on or connected to a retro title, but *Nono Monkey* is a little different. Released by Jerome's Bitnana Software for iOS, it's a fun little puzzle game boasting 30 levels and a development period that was very similar to programming on the Lynx. "Paul Bonsey, who did the audio for *Ms Pac-Man* on the Lynx, is the co-programmer with me on this new game," explains Jerome. "Additionally, the audio engineer and musician that helped me with some Lynx games, Robert Vieira, is our audio guy on *Nono Monkey*. I am also in contact with my artist friends that I worked with at Atari on Lynx projects, Susan McBride and Eric 'Coyote' Elliott. The ol' gang is getting back together to bring out some great new games and we couldn't be happier about our collaborative efforts moving forward. *Nono Monkey* is a brand new game design, and it has been a great experience, very reminiscent of the Lynx days for me. We can't wait to share it with the world."**

heavy competition from Nintendo's Game Boy, and later Sega's Game Gear, meant the Lynx found it very hard to compete.

This in itself is a massive shame, as the Lynx really was an arcade fan's dream. Even if Sega's handheld had some big-name arcade titles, their conversions were hardly up to the standards of the Lynx's impressive ports, which really pushed what you'd expect to see from a handheld console.

Scott is convinced that the Lynx's hardware design is mainly responsible for the high number of solid arcade conversions that appear on the machine. "The Lynx architecture and development tools, particularly with respect to graphics, sound, performance and memory, were significantly more flexible and powerful than the tile and sprite architectures of the slower Game Boy and Game Gear platforms," he explains. "It had a great development environment and support, too. All those things contribute to getting more from your development dollar or hour and lead to more faithful ports."

And they certainly were very faithful ports, with many of the games being not only extremely authentic to the original arcade games – as in the case of *Joust*, *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *RoadBlasters* – but often including additional extras that weren't found in the source machine. *Rampage* featured an additional monster in Larry the lab rat and offered support for four players, up from the arcade machine's three; *Rampart* contained brand new intermissions but dropped the third player; while *Super Asteroids & Missile Command* was massively enhanced over the originals.

When we speak to developers about porting arcade games, we're usually told that there is little to no support from the original arcade team, with many developers simply being given an arcade machine of the game in question and told to get on with it. While this is certainly true of some of the games found on the Lynx, developers sometimes had additional support when converting games.

> **"The Lynx's commercial underperformance is a massive shame, as the system really was an arcade fan's dream"**

"I received and still have the source to *RoadBlasters*, which was written in C," reveals Scott when we ask him about the support that developers would receive. "It was very helpful to faithfully re-create every car, cannon, tree and fuel ball in all 50 levels. I also have the source to *S.T.U.N. Runner*, also in C, which helped populate the levels and gave [me] insight to how the AI worked, but I spent lots of hours playing through that game in my garage because the cabinet, even when disassembled, was just too big to get up and into my second-storey condo."

Things didn't work out quite so well on the development of *Toki*, another excellent conversion from Scott, but a little ingenuity and plenty of hard work meant that he was eventually able to deliver a conversion that was just as polished as his *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *RoadBlasters* ports.

"We got nothing but the licence and a coin-op from TAD for *Toki*," he recalls. "We pulled the ROM chips out, read them, and wrote programs to extract the source graphics, which was a mixed blessing. They were all tiled, palletised sprites, which came out basically as a miscoloured font. The artists had to piece all the characters together to rebuild each frame of animation and recolourise them, then they could reduce their colours and size for the Lynx. It was a lot of work but totally worth it to get perfect proportions and shapes of every sprite animation frame. I also installed a pause toggle switch on the *Toki* coin-op cabinet





that would allow you to halt the 68000 processor at any time to get a look at the screen, and if you were lucky you could unpause it and continue later. I was working on *S.T.U.N. Runner* in the evenings and on weekends, which in a lot of ways was an extension of *RoadBlasters*, and I really loved working on *Toki* during the day. *Toki* was my first platform game, my first reverse-engineered game, and my first coin-op modification. For those and a lot of other reasons, it was a very exciting time."

Jerome recalls similar issues while working on *Rampart*, which he coded with Eric Ginner. "*Rampart* was an arcade game, and we were allowed to bring the Atari Games coin-op into the department so we could really study it," he begins. "We had some great artists working with us, some wonderful sound engineers too, but we were not provided any code, so we went about learning the game and then coding it all from scratch. *Rampart* was our fourth Lynx game, so we were pretty comfortable with developing for the Lynx by this time. It only took a short period of time, since we were able to focus strictly on its development and we had artistic resources to assist."

There were a few occasions, though, when even an arcade machine wasn't available for the coders to use. Fortunately, Jerome had access to a secret weapon, which ensured that this wasn't a problem.

"Eric and myself were very proud of the *Ms Pac-Man* port because we were not provided any code, nor did we have the arcade machine," he explains. "We did, however, have Eric Ginner, a professional arcade competitor and expert with many of the old arcade games, and he knew them inside and out… including *Ms Pac-Man*. The trivia fact worth noting here was that Eric hadn't done any programming prior to this undertaking, and I had not done any 65C02 assembly programming to any notable scale – just hacking at my Atari 400 when I was younger. It was a big undertaking, to be sure, and to top it off, we were doing our day jobs as QA testers during the day while we worked on the game after hours 'for fun' – we were young then and had that kind of energy. Once we whipped out *Ms Pac-Man*, management saw that we better served the company as programmers and we quickly were able to focus on development."

Eric and Jerome's unusual approach to their port is the main reason why it was *Ms Pac-Man* and not *Pac-Man* that was ported to Atari's handheld. "Eric knew *Ms Pac-Man* so well that we picked that as our first game to introduce us to the development environment," continues Jerome. "It wasn't until a few weeks into development that we approached our bosses and said, 'Look what we've done,' and they instantly started pursuing the licensing deal. It all happened by happenstance really; there was no big design or plan. We were just two young guys that were hungry and had an opportunity."

This after-hours approach would be frowned upon today, but it was par for the course back in Atari Corp's early days. It's also the reason why *S.T.U.N. Runner*, on which Scott only revealed his role recently, doesn't have any actual credits on it. Atari was infamous for not crediting its developers in the early days because it was concerned about programmers getting poached by rivals, but the reason was very different on *S.T.U.N. Runner*.

"You'll notice that no one was credited on *S.T.U.N. Runner*," he points out. "I was contracted through a third-party with Atari. I feared that if it were discovered there would be a conflict of interest. The worst-case scenario would have been if Atari decided to claim they owned it, after I finished it. They may have been able to reclaim the

## Canned Lynx

**D Scott Williamson gives a brief lowdown on some of the arcade conversions that were apparently started for Atari's Lynx but never released**

### X 720°

**Developer: Atari Corporation**

"Our in-house producer/designer Steve Ryno was a huge fan of this game. We had the coin-op in the office for a while and I know it was started for the Lynx. I don't remember the developer or what happened to it, but I saw several milestones of it."

### X BLOOD AND GUTS HOCKEY

**Developer: Atari Corporation**

"This sounds like one of Craig Erickson's projects, but I have no idea what happened beyond that."

### X ROLLING THUNDER

**Developer: Atari Corporation**

"I think this was being done by Matt Markwalder and possibly Joel Seider. Matt left Atari before the game was finished, though."

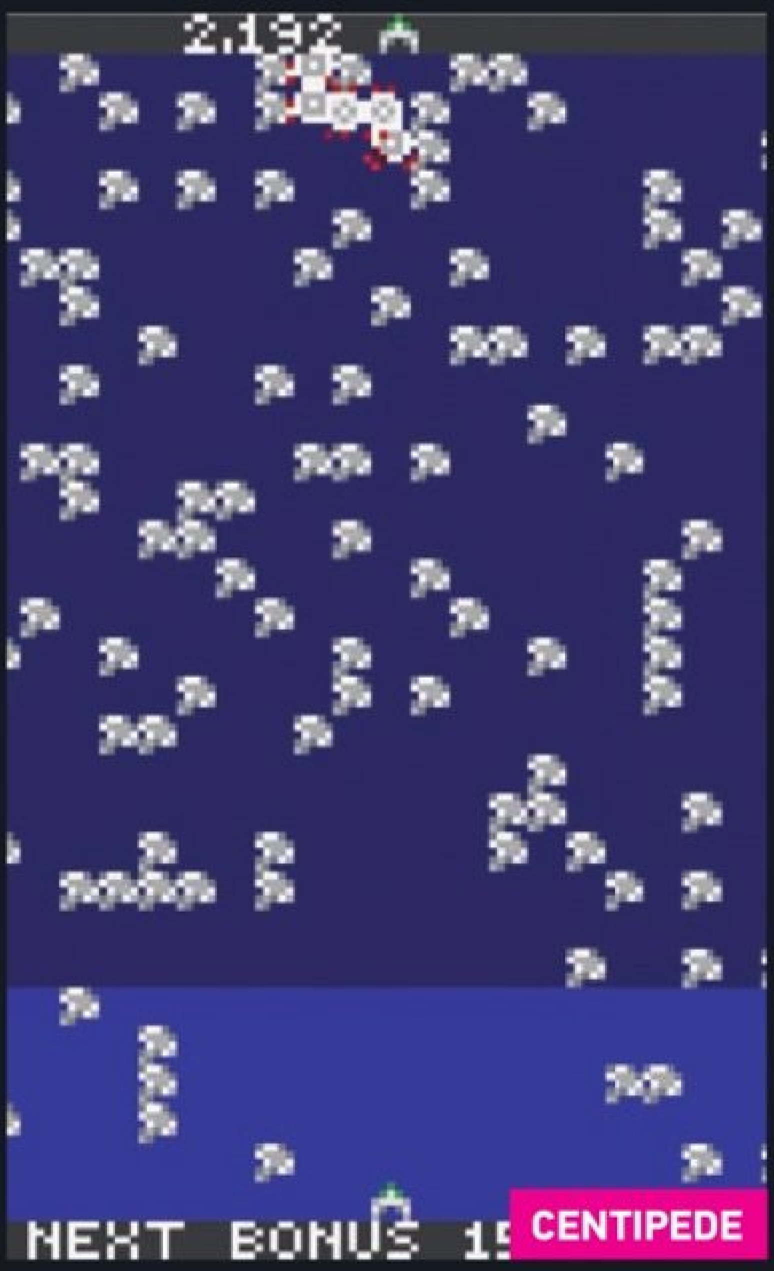
### X VINDICATORS

**Developer: Atari Corporation**

"This was in development in my office at Atari by a guy – I can't remember his name – but it got pretty far along; I'm surprised it wasn't finished or released. He loved coffee and went on to work on the fledgling grocery business, Peapod."



VINDICATORS




CENTIPEDE

### And the rest…

**X BERZERK**
Developer: Shadowsoft

**X CABAL**
Developer: Atari Corporation/Fabtek

**X CENTIPEDE**
Developer: Shadowsoft

**X DEFENDER**
Developer: Shadowsoft

**X DUNGEON SLAYERS**
Developer: Atari Corporation

**X ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS**
Developer: Atari Corporation

**X GEO DUEL**
Developer: Atari Corporation

**X MOON PATROL**
Developer: Shadowsoft

**X SKULL & CROSSBONES**
Developer: Atari Corporation

**X STRIDER**
Developer: Capcom USA

**X SUPER SPRINT**
Developer: Atari Corporation

**X RELIEF PICTURE**
Developer: Atari Corporation

## First time's the charm

**We spoke to Gil Colgate about his own recollections while porting Xenophobe**

**Retro Gamer: How much access did you have to the *Xenophobe* coin-op?**
**Gil Colgate:** We had one at the office that we did not need to add quarters into, so we could play it regularly. It used a great deal more memory and had much faster processors than the Lynx, so I did not bother to reverse engineer it by looking at the hardware. Instead, I just 'drew from life'.

**RG: What was the hardest thing to port?**
**GC:** The actual thing that took the most time getting to work properly was the 'RedEye' network, which enabled *Xenophobe* on Lynx to be played co-op by four players who linked their Lynxes together. Also, the number of images for all the levels could not possibly fit into a ROM cartridge. Instead I constructed the background images from a number of primitives, essentially polygons. We had no editor, so I basically typed the values into the program, rather like using XML.

**RG: Your control system seemed far more intuitive than the original arcade machine's. Was this intentional?**
**GC:** Yes, of course.

**RG: Why do you think the Lynx had so many high-quality conversions on it?**
**GC:** Atari was paying for conversions. They did not want original product; they wanted conversions. Hence we made conversions. I think it was mostly expertise and scoping that made the conversions good. When you have a small thing to fill in, you do it the best way possible.

**RG: Why do you think the Lynx ultimately failed as a system?**
**GC:** The thing that killed the Lynx was not using a 50-cent part. If you should drop the Lynx, there was a high chance that a small part in the AC power adaptor would break. This meant that the Lynx could no longer run from AC and had to eat batteries. It ate a lot of batteries. This meant many people would buy a Lynx, use it for a while, and then discover that it no longer ran from the wall and their batteries were dead. It would then sit unused or be thrown out. Craig Nelson, whom I worked with, tried to get Atari to replace the part in his specs, but they wouldn't budge, as this would eat into the profit per unit.







advance because I was a salaried employee. In that case, I would have done it for free."

Even though some Lynx ports were done on the sly and others were made with little or no help from external publishers, most of the conversions were surprisingly painless to create, with the average conversion taking between three and six months to finish. This quick turnaround no doubt helps to explain why so many arcade ports – nearly 30 in total – were produced during the Lynx's lifetime. Jerome was able to give us a little more insight into the actual porting process…

"It was really simple in my experience, but I'm not sure this is the right or best way to pursue it," he admits. "First identify the game you want to port. Second, learn everything there is to know about the game. All details: how it plays, the nuances, what makes it fun, and get the timing down – that's critical. Third, acquire all the assets you can get your hands on. If there is art, code, sound files, and it's available to you – grab it and run! Fourth, figure out a game plan as to what team members will be involved and what their responsibilities will be; divide and conquer and hit it hard. Lastly, you'll need to assign someone to be the decision maker for those times when tough choices need to be made. This typically falls to a producer. However, the caveat to this is make sure the team agrees early on that people will continue to work together, even when you don't agree 100 per cent. You must always put the project first and never take the development process personally – even when you're in crunch mode and you want to hurt people because you're tired. Ultimately, you have to make sure you have a good QA group on the game to ensure that you didn't miss something. [You need] someone with a good eye and great attention to detail. Do all those things, and your port will turn out all right."

In addition to delivering solid ports, Atari Corp developers would often bring extra touches to games, as we've already mentioned. With the relatively high cost of Lynx games at the time of release (new titles typically cost around £30), many developers would add extras to their arcade ports in order to offer better value for money to the gamer. This process wasn't chosen by every developer, though, with Scott preferring to simply deliver as authentic a game as possible.

"All my games were all straight ports," he reveals. "At heart, I'm a purist. If something is good enough, popular enough to copy, the copy ought to be authentic, or at the very least contain an authentic mode or option. Personally, I think that some port pluses actually lose something in the 'improvements'. It's kind of like going to see a concert and the band does a rendition of a popular song that's nothing like the released version. If you are going to mess with a classic, you better make sure that it's going to be cool, that most people will like it at least as much as the original."

Another reason why Scott prefers to create ports of an arcade game is due to the challenge involved in replicating it, often on a system that has nowhere near the power or abilities of the host machine. "Seriously, ports are the ultimate game for a technologist," he says. "All the design, art and sound decisions are made, you have a perfect version of exactly what the finished game should be like right in front of you; all you have to do is coax the target platform to do 'that'. I had great support from art and sound, and the platform was powerful enough to allow me to bring all of the assets together and re-create the original gameplay."

Regardless of whether you were a fan of the authentic ports or preferred the enhanced versions that were available for the Lynx, there's

> **"Arcade ports were a reason to own a Lynx, but also a significant factor in why it couldn't loosen Nintendo's stranglehold on the market"**

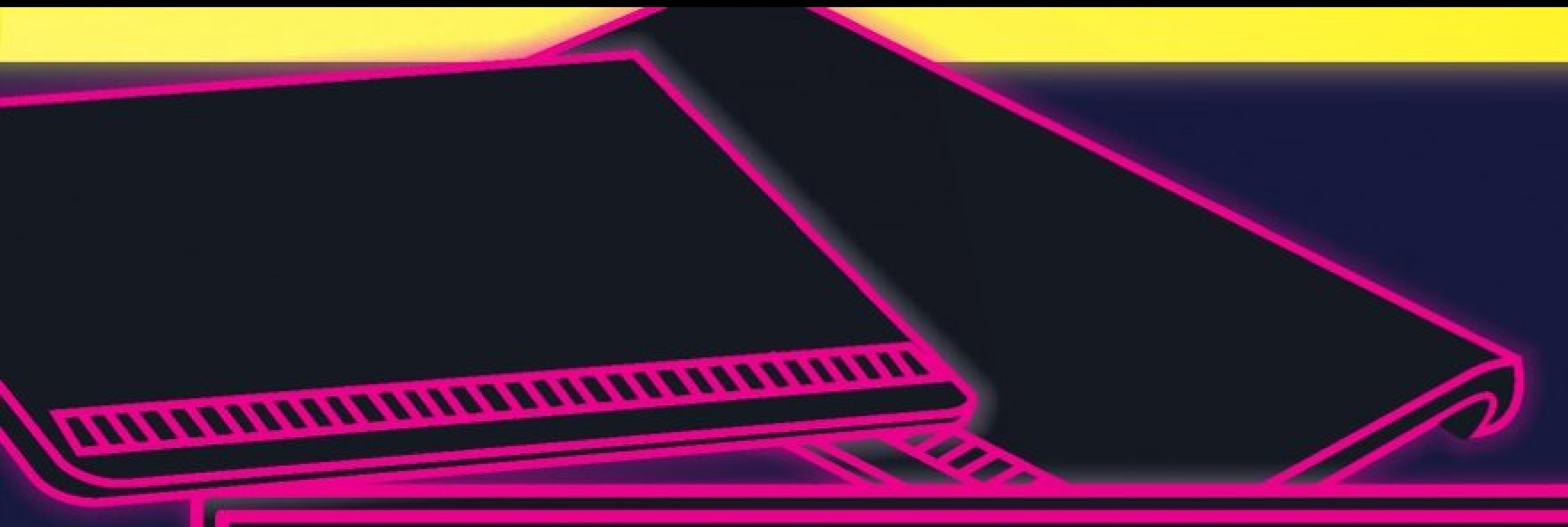








» [Lynx] *Raiden* (left) was one of many titles picked up by Telegames. Unfortunately, it's a weak adaptation of the hit coin-op.
» [Lynx] While it was let down by control issues, *Hard Drivin'* (above) is still an impressive showcase of the Lynx's capabilities.
» [Lynx] The excellent conversion of *Rampart* (right) features additional cut-scenes that weren't in the arcade original.



# Converting Klax

**Greg Omi reveals how he created his astonishing Klax port**



**Retro Gamer: How did you get to work on *Klax*?**
**Greg Omi:** They showed me *Klax* as well as *S.T.U.N. Runner*, *Hard Drivin'* and a few others. I needed to work on something light since I was doing developer support so I chose *Klax*. Actually, after I finished *Klax*, Ed Rotberg wanted me to work on *S.T.U.N. Runner*, but I got pissed at Atari Corp and quit. The guys at Atari Games were great, but they were a different company.

**RG: How long did the conversion take to complete?**
**GO:** I think it was about three months part-time, since I was doing the developer support stuff at the same time.

**RG: How did you make your version sound better than the arcade machine?**
**GO:** The arcade version was PCM encoded and they didn't have the source sounds, so we had to record off the machines. Lx came up with a filter to smooth out the sound and tuned it to the Lynx speaker and case so it would sound good when you were holding the system.

**RG: What help did you receive?**
**GO:** When I chose *Klax*, they sent over a coin-op and the source code and I played it a bunch and translated the code to assembler – the coin-op was written in C. I had various artists converting the tiles and making backgrounds. I seem to remember it being a little tricky because the coin-op had more tile colours than I could display on the Lynx at one time, but I think we solved it with dithering. The bulk of the work was getting all of the sounds to fit in RAM and writing a streaming system to get the voice and applause off the cartridge when it needed to play them.

**RG: What do you think is the best Atari Lynx arcade conversion and why?**
**GO:** I'm biased, but I'd have to say *Klax*! I think it is the best arcade port of *Klax* and maybe the best arcade port of any kind ever – not counting the Neo Geo, of course, since they were the same code. I really worked hard to give the player the exact play experience as in the arcade, including the sound, even with the limited hardware.









no denying that Atari Corp's fondness for arcade conversions was a reason to own the system, but also a significant factor in why the machine wasn't able to loosen Nintendo's eventual stranglehold on the handheld market. We were interested to hear if there was any huge rivalry between the two companies due to them both being competitors in the same market, and the reports are somewhat mixed…

"When we heard that Nintendo was bringing out the Game Boy, we knew our hardware was superior – but we knew that Nintendo had more financial resources for marketing their product," recalls Jerome about Nintendo's massively popular handheld. "Quite frankly, their management was much more aggressive about marketing their product. Nintendo also had some excellent game designers working for their platform."

"In my technical/development role I didn't have enough information to know exactly how [Atari] saw any competition, though personally I don't think they took it seriously enough," says Scott. "I think they compared the platforms technically, but underestimated the significance of the price difference, Nintendo's ability to make quality titles, and ultimately Nintendo's ability to leverage its market position and retailer relationships earned with the hugely successful NES/Famicom console to market and sell Game Boys and Game Boy games.

"I still remember the launch CES. Having just finished *RoadBlasters*, my first solo game, I was working the Atari booth at the 1989 winter CES in Chicago, the year both the Lynx and Game Boy were launched. Sam Tramiel, the CEO and president of Atari at the time, walked over to the Nintendo booth during a Game Boy launch presentation and showed off the Lynx. It generated quite a stir – both for the impact of the obvious technical differences between the platforms and, unfortunately, for Sam's unseemly use of Nintendo's event to promote Atari's new Lynx handheld. The Lynx was technically superior, but was also nearly twice the size and twice as expensive with half the battery life. Nintendo had no problems manufacturing and distributing the Game Boy for the Christmas season, [but] unfortunately the Lynx, for whatever reason, could not keep up with demand."

Atari Corp's Lynx may not have been able to compete on even terms with Nintendo's Game Boy, but it remains a genuinely fascinating addition to any handheld library. The vast majority of its ports truly stand the test of time and in some cases, *S.T.U.N. Runner* in particular, have yet to be equalled by any other system.

"I like to think that the Lynx is remembered fondly, simply because the gaming platform was thought of so fondly by the actual developers," finishes Jerome. "The people I worked with during the launch of the hardware and the development of the games for the Lynx, to this day I cannot think of one person that dreaded doing the work – they absolutely loved creating on the hardware. We all felt it was very advanced for the time so we were cutting edge, and the development environment nurtured creativity and did not stifle or restrict it. Quite frankly, it was one of the best times in my life that I can recall on a professional level. With that passion, excitement and energy, hopefully all that good mojo was reflected within the games themselves. I like to think that the fans picked up on that and appreciated all of our hard work and passion."

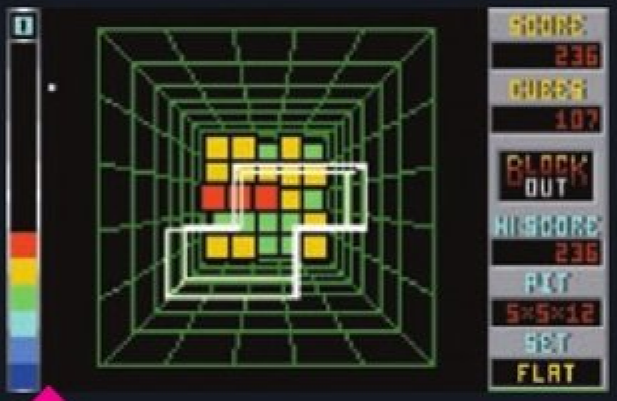
**Special thanks to Martin Goldberg, and AtariAge and its supportive community, for their help with this article.**

# CONVERSIONS R US

**We take a look at the arcade conversions that received a retail release for Atari's Lynx**




**APB**
**Released: 1991**
While it retains much of the arcade game's humour, this Lynx conversion is let down by squashed visuals and a tiny playing area. The controls are also troubling due to being a little too fiddly, meaning it can be quite hard to steer your car at higher speeds.



**BLOCK OUT**
**Released: 1991**
There's a dearth of *Tetris*-like puzzlers on the Lynx, so *Block Out* is worthy of investigation, even if it's not a great example of the genre. It's a faithful adaptation of the original arcade game, but lacks the additional bells and whistles of other Lynx ports.



**DOUBLE DRAGON**
**Released: 1993**
The great news is that *Double Dragon* looks fantastic thanks to large sprites that look very similar to their arcade counterparts. Sadly, the cramped playing area makes it overly difficult, while the control setup doesn't handle the action as well as the Game Boy.



**HARD DRIVIN'**
**Released: 1991**
*Hard Drivin'* is another ambitious port. Developed by John Sanderson, who also worked on *Steel Talons*, it's an impressive attempt at a near-impossible task. Ultimately it's the clunky controls that kill Sanderson's game, though, which is a real shame.



**HYDRA**
**Released: 1992**
*Hydra* is another solid conversion. It's a little slow, meaning it lacks the breakneck pace of the original arcade game, but it remains a fun blaster. As with many Lynx games it's technically excellent, with really superb scaling effects.



**JOUST**
**Released: 1992**
Shadowsoft only released a few Lynx games, but they were all corkers. *Joust* is an amazingly faithful reproduction that looks fantastic on the Lynx. Fast-paced gameplay, the original multiplayer and additional difficulty levels make this one a keeper.



**KLAX**
**Released: 1990**
Easily one of the Lynx's best conversions. The vertical orientation shows off the beautiful visuals, while the speech throughout is absolutely fantastic. Released relatively early in the Lynx's life, it's a great game that's perfectly suited to the handheld format.



**MS PAC-MAN**
**Released: 1990**
We've always preferred *Ms Pac-Man* to *Pac-Man*, and the Lynx was treated to a very nice version. The mazes are a little weird due to the chosen orientation, but it's still a faithful port of the original arcade game that fans will enjoy and want to seek out.



**NINJA GAIDEN**
**Released: 1991**
This is quite simply the best beat-'em-up on the Lynx. The pace isn't as nippy as the original and it's lacking the second player and certain moves, but *Ninja Gaiden* is a highly impressive conversion. It's a pity we never got many Tecmo ports, as this one is ace.



**PAC-LAND**
**Released: 1991**
Apparently the only Lynx game Joe Seider worked on, and it's a nice one to have on your CV. It's speedy, features great cartoony visuals and boasts many of the secrets from the original game. It's another very good port that's perfectly suited to the host hardware.



**PAPERBOY**
**Released: 1990**
The Lynx delivers – ho ho – a solid port of Atari's arcade game. Animation is decent and the controls are responsive, while the graphics are bright and colourful. It's slower than the arcade game, but this actually helps to avoid incoming hazards.



**PIT-FIGHTER**
**Released: 1992**
Atari's fighter was pretty poor on home systems, and the Lynx is little different. The scaling effects are cool, but the lousy animation, muddy visuals and unresponsive controls really let it down. It's one of the better versions, but that's not saying much.




**QIX**
**Released: 1991**
We're big fans of Taito's *Qix*, so we're pleased that the game boasts a respectable port on the Lynx. It's not as good as the excellent Game Boy offering, due to the predictability of the Qix itself and this version's slower pace, but it's nonetheless a fun conversion of the excellent arcade puzzler.



**RAIDEN**
**Released: 1997**
*Raiden* is a pretty poor conversion, bearing little relation to the original arcade game. The zoomed in viewpoint, although necessary for making out the tiny sprites, makes manoeuvring very difficult, and the sluggish pace means it lacks the excitement of the original coin-op. A disappointing conversion that's best left alone.



**RAMPAGE**
**Released: 1990**
This is a great adaptation, with a number of changes made to take into account the Lynx's smaller screen. The levels are no longer contained within a single screen, there's now four-player support, and there's a new character in Larry, an oversized rat.



**RAMPART**
**Released: 1992**
*Rampart* is a highly underrated coin-op and the same can be said for this port. The Lynx's D-pad makes it a little tougher, but the slick pacing, additional cut-scenes and great visuals make this an essential addition to any Lynx owner's collection.




**ROADBLASTERS**
**Released: 1990**
Even now we're stunned by how good this conversion is. Amazingly fast and featuring astonishing visuals, it's a superb conversion that captures all the thrills and excitement of the original. Hardly surprising, as it was converted using the original source code.




**ROBOTRON: 2084**
**Released: 1991**
With no second D-pad, the A and B buttons are used to rotate the direction you fire in. It's not perfect, but it still works surprisingly well and it's particularly well suited to a handheld. Easily one of the best home versions of Williams' coin-op.




**RYGAR**
**Released: 1990**
*Rygar* is another great port that does an impressive job of emulating the original arcade game. It lacks some of the moves from the original and it feels slower, but it's accurate enough to please fans. An enjoyable port, which is worth tracking down.




**STEEL TALONS**
**Released: 1992**
John Sanderson's other Lynx conversion falls into the same traps as *Hard Drivin'*. It's a technically proficient piece of work, which impressively shows off the Lynx's capabilities, but it's let down by its incredibly slow pace and frustrating controls.



**S.T.U.N. RUNNER**
**Released: 1991**
This is quite simply the best conversion you can get on Atari's machine. Gob-smackingly fast and amazingly authentic, it's a miniature marvel that puts every other version to shame. An incredible technical achievement that has the gameplay to back it up.



**SUPER OFF ROAD**
**Released: 1993**
Graphically, *Super Off Road* is excellent, with wonderfully animated trucks that look just like the arcade game. Controls are decent, with great handling that mirrors the coin-op. What a pity, then, that the zoomed view can make it hard to see where you're racing.




**TOKI**
**Released: 1992**
The Lynx is rather lacking in decent platformers, so *Toki* is worth seeking out, as it's one of the best available examples. It's another cracking conversion that boasts excellent visuals, great animation and extremely challenging gameplay.



**TOURNAMENT CYBERBALL 2072**
**Released: 1991**
'Ambitious' is probably the kindest way to describe Atari's port of its popular futuristic take on American football. While it features impressive scaling effects, it chugs along at a slow pace, which kills much of the excitement that the original game generated.




**XENOPHOBE**
**Released: 1990**
It's a pity that Gil Colgate didn't work on more Lynx games, as this is superb. Catering for four players – one more than the arcade machine – and featuring a far more accessible control system, it's another excellent conversion and a riot with other players.



**XYBOTS**
**Released: 1991**
It's a little slow, but this is still a very good port, mainly because it features a very intuitive control system. Navigating the large mazes is surprisingly easy, while the co-op play captures the competitiveness of the arcade original. All in all, a fine effort.

# Future Classic

*Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come*







### INFO

- **Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **Year Released:** 2003
- **Publisher:** Sony
- **Developer:** Level-5
- **Key People:** Akihiro Hino (game design/scenario producer), Takeshi Majima (art director), Tomohito Nishiura (music)

### GO DEEPER

- ***Dark Chronicle* is known as *Dark Cloud II* everywhere but the UK, where the first game fizzled out at retail.**
- **Though the two games have no direct storytelling ties, they are set on the same world.**



# 17. DARK CHRONICLE

***As diversely designed and full-featured as a roleplaying game has ever been, the world of Dark Chronicle turned every distraction into a time-eating pleasure***

### THE BACKGROUND

Level-5 began life in 1998 and, after mild success from its first release, *Dark Cloud*, in 2000, the developer again collaborated with Sony on a sequel. This would fix the issues that kept the original's review scores hovering around the seven and eight mark, publicly acknowledging bugbears like breakable weapons and a superfluous story, as well as addressing the complaints of bland art direction. The most noticeable change in *Dark Chronicle* would be the look of it, which took the cel-shading style that had become embarrassingly popular at the time and transformed the visuals into a selling point. Rather than merely jumping on this tired bandwagon, though, Level-5 employed the technique in a way that gave the graphics a timeless quality, drawing favourable comparisons to anime and aiming to sell this sequel to a larger audience, though sales numbers were similar across both games.

*Dark Chronicle* was definitely built on the foundations of its predecessor – advancing the mechanics and ironing out the nonsense that had frustrated gamers, this was a model sequel, and justifiably earned higher review scores and a passionate following in the West. Strangely, despite *Dark Cloud*'s already positive reception, its sequel ended up being one of the most improved follow-ups of its time. Level-5 even designed the mini-games in *Dark Chronicle* to be the same size as a standalone game; this overload of refined content would be noted positively by critics, though to date the franchise hasn't continued in any form.

### THE GAME

The PS2 was a healthy platform for the Japanese RPG, seeing franchises like *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* hit high creative watermarks – but *Dark Chronicle* was more creatively daring than all of them, combining traditional roleplaying-style dungeon crawling with a real creative flair and intimidating levels of customisation. This allowed a great deal of player expression in a whimsical and imaginative

## Things of note



### Trust in Steve

Customisable ridepod Steve is a steampunk-esque contraption that protagonist Max uses as a special attack, and which it can be upgraded to deal mighty damage.



### Cartoon styling

Cel-shading was a last-generation fad, used arbitrarily in most cases, but the consensus with *Dark Chronicle* agreed that it elevated the look of the game over the original.



### Georama lives on

For the release of *White Knight Chronicles* in the West, Level-5 updated the game to include *Dark Chronicle*'s Georama system for the hub areas of its newest RPG.



### Failed fantasy

*Dark Chronicle* led to Level-5 making Xbox MMORPG *True Fantasy Live Online*. Microsoft ended the project in June 2004, and the two firms haven't worked together since.




### Better known for…

Level-5's two big hitters, *Professor Layton* and *Inazuma Eleven*, dwarf the company's earlier RPGs. They helped cement its reputation as a triple-A Japanese publisher.



» [PS2] The clown-alike Emperor Griffon is voiced by *Time Runner* and *Star Wars* actor Mark Hamill.



» [PS2] The game's cel-shaded visuals have a European comic book flavour to them.



## What the press thought



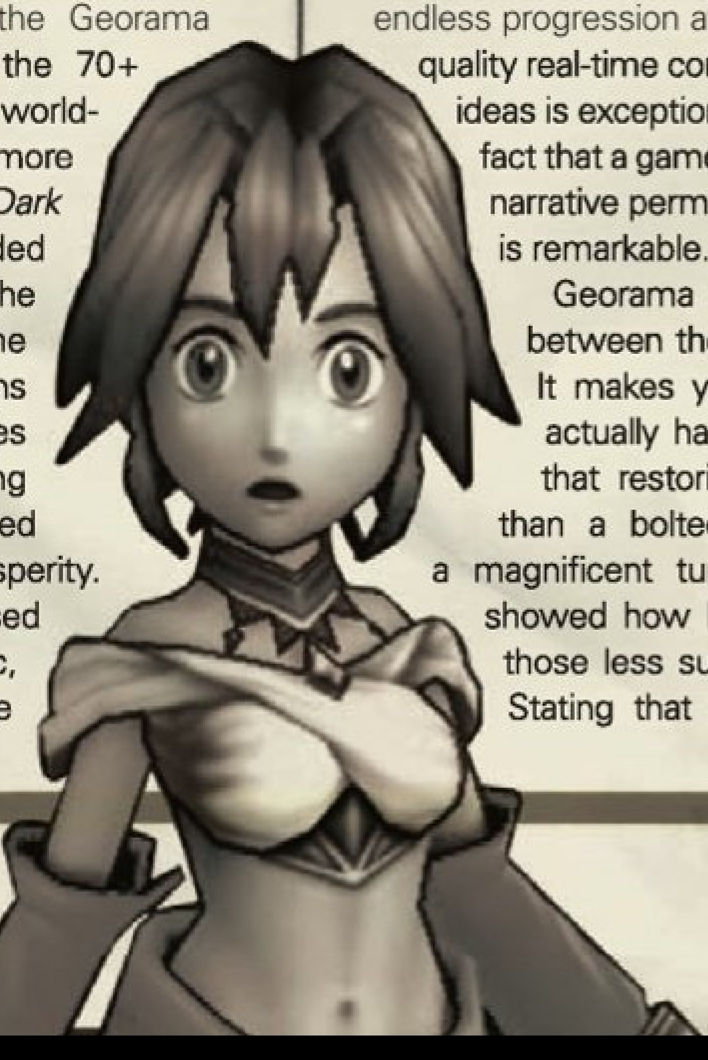

**Play**
**Score: 92%**
"It takes a bit of time to grow on you, but once *Dark Cloud 2* has you in its grasp, it won't let go for a very long time."

**IGN**
**Score: 9.0/10**
"In the end, *Dark Cloud 2* is a superb RPG that doesn't disappoint. Buy it, play it, then play it some more."

fantasy universe. This is one the most packed titles on the PS2, with even the mini-games unfolding into huge, hour-swallowing ventures, along with a town-building strategy element that may well be its strongest feature of all.

*Dark Chronicle*'s similarities to the original *Dark Cloud* are innumerable, yet accessibility tweaks meant it was easier to get to grasps with right away. Almost by default, the visuals are attention-catching – but it's so obviously the Georama system that locked gamers into the 70+ hour experience. A *Sim City*-esque world-building simulator, but on a smaller, more detailed scale, this hangover from *Dark Cloud* was commendably expanded upon and fed into progress within the main quest. Finding Geostones in the game's random, sprawling dungeons essentially provided the bits and pieces to make the towns, while putting citizens into these newly renovated locations helped restore them to prosperity.

This is vital, as the story is based around a time travel mechanic, where you have to repair the future by creating towns in the past in order to advance. Though anyone could get on with the interface, Georama unfolds into incredibly complex micromanagement. That's not even mentioning the equally in-depth item creation mode, which rewards replaying the game's tough dungeons in similarly brilliant fashion. Absolutely everything, including the masterful golf-esque Spheda and the black hole of time that is the fishing minigame, leads back into the endless progression at the heart of *Dark Chronicle*'s quality real-time combat. This wealth of gameplay ideas is exceptionally woven together – and the fact that a game with such a huge overarching narrative permits such experimentation really is remarkable.



Georama forges a strong connection between the player and the environment. It makes you feel that your actions are actually having a meaningful effect, and that restoring the world is much more than a bolted-on part of the adventure, a magnificent turn of gameplay design that showed how keen Level-5 was to impress those less sure of the original *Dark Cloud*. Stating that the game's many diversions are as complete as most full games does sound like something that should be put on a press release, but Level-5 didn't leave a single weak point with *Dark Chronicle*, regardless of the gameplay style at hand, and the cohesiveness of every feature resulted in a unique RPG.

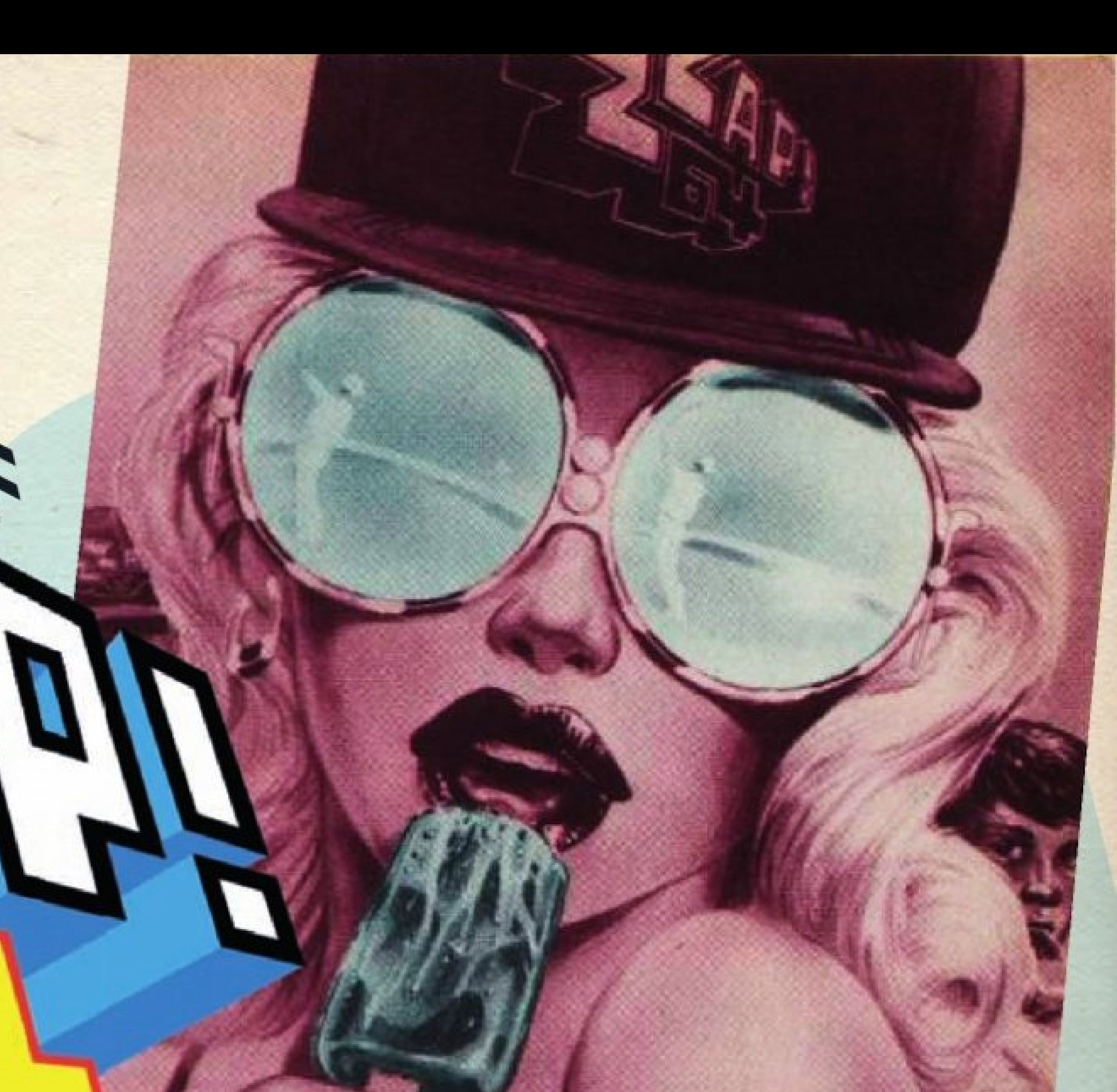
### WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

It's the combination of player expression, accessibility and long-term play that made the game so far ahead of its time. *Dark Chronicle* has a multitude of different, accomplished games brought together around its dungeon crawling – and the combination of ideas is so esoteric that we doubt it could happen in the riskier modern world of modern development.

With the JRPG having been in a bit of a rough state of the last few years, *Dark Chronicle* summarises an era when this type of game was frequently innovative, whereas Level-5's output in the last few years has felt mostly safe. This sequel showed a developer hungry to impress and iterate on its laudable ideas from the first *Dark Cloud*, and the level of variety and polish means that every RPG aficionado just has to sink a large portion of their life into it.

# THE MAKING OF ZZAP! 64





## It was the magazine that launched the careers of Julian Rignall and Gary Penn, among others, the publication that persuaded Newsfield to enter the software market with Thalamus Ltd, and to this day remains the essential guide to all things C64. Retro Gamer speaks to many of the key people behind its pages

**Retro Gamer: Tell us about that first ever issue. Were there concerns about taking on another magazine at such an early stage of Newsfield's life?**

**Roger Kean:** The first issue, cover date May 1985, went on sale in mid-April, but the planning for what would become *Zzap!64* began in the early autumn of 1984. With hindsight, it suggests we felt confident that Newsfield had established itself securely enough by then to risk a second publication. The birth of *Crash* had been painful and nearly ruinous, with our first distributor going bankrupt on us after delivering the second issue, which meant we hadn't received a penny of income to offset the costs of production and printing. Only the more than anticipated advertising revenue kept us afloat… barely.

Fortunately, Comag – Britain's largest magazine distributor – picked us up and advanced monies for the next six issues, and *Crash* sales became satisfactory, if not spectacular. Comag's backing enabled us to move to new and much larger premises in King Street. At that point, what had been a team of myself, Oliver Frey, Franco Frey, Matthew Uffindell on reviews and David Western on art, with mail order and secretarial support from Denise Robins and Carol Kinsey, grew rapidly with the addition of a staff writer and assistant editors, Graeme Kidd and Jeremy Spencer. Their task mainly comprised handling the score of Ludlow school kids who acted as the reviewing pool, while Matthew began increasingly to move towards our embryonic production.

**RG: What sort of tools were you using to produce the magazine back then?**

**RK:** Newsfield's mission was to use the latest available technology to speed up production and decrease the costs associated with traditional typesetting and film planning, all done in London. We instituted Apricot computers running MS-DOS with Microsoft Word in mid-1984 and began using CORA codes to format the typeface into galleys to be run out at the local instant printer. A process camera came along next to convert black-and-white photographs for the screenshots and editorial pictures to the dot-matrix required for the printing process.



» Roger Kean

**RG: Why choose the C64 over the (cough) superior Amstrad?**

**RK:** In part, it was this forward-looking methodology that first attracted Chris Anderson to Newsfield – that and the ideal of editing a single-format games magazine instead of one covering all aspects of gaming. Of course, we had our eyes on the new Amstrad, but the Commodore 64 was Chris's best love and the machine had rapidly established a decent user base, whereas the Amstrad was untried and untested right then. Besides, Jeremy Spencer had his jealous eye on the Amstrad. So we went with the C64 and put the Amstrad on the back burner for the time being.

**RG: Where did the name *Zzap!64* come from?**

**RK:** Once the industry's general hilarity at naming a computer magazine *Crash* abated in the face of its success, the word went out that our next launch would be named *Bang*, followed, natch, by *Wallop*. And, in truth, Oliver and myself rather fancied *Bang*. Fortunately, Chris overruled it when he came on board, although in the end it was Oliver who came up with *Zap!*. Something short and sharp. But *Zap!* looked too short for a masthead and clearly it needed the identity of the C64, so another 'Z' went in and '64' on the end. The double-z also made the concept of a *Zzap!* Sizzler pretty obvious.

**RG: How much easier was it to set up *Zzap!* compared to *Crash*?**

### FREY ON FREY

ZZAP! ISSUE 1

**"Not one of** my favourite covers. Somehow, *Elite 64* did nothing to inspire me and I feel that the cover turned out more 'bitty' than overpowering, as a launch cover should have been. If I recall correctly it was also a rush job due to a late decision as to what would make it onto the cover, so no thought went into making it 'iconic'."



**RK:** *Zzap!64* was a much easier magazine to set up and launch than *Crash* had been. For a start, we knew the industry better and the software houses were crying out for a decent advertising vehicle. And then Chris Anderson looked after everything on the editorial front, from recruiting the staff writers Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and Bob Wade, to delivery of everything the much-expanded art department in Ludlow needed for layout. One of the new intake up in the art room was a certain Mark Kendrick, a natural talent, but not so good at removing Cow Gum from the layout sheets before inking in the column rules, with an inevitable bludge somewhere down the ruled line… Our distributor, Comag, was right behind the launch and so the first-issue sales of *Zzap!* were considerably better than those for *Crash* had been, and advertising reaction was close to ecstatic. Perhaps the only person on the team who was less than thrilled by the new magazine was Carol Kinsey, who had adjusted to answering the telephone for *Crash*, but found it ridiculous having to say, 'Hello, *Crash* and *Zzap!*…' How much worse would it have been answering the phone with: '*Crash*, *Bang* and *Wallop*, how can I help you?'

**RG: Where did the idea for Diary Of A Game originate? You had Andrew Braybrook talking about *Paradroid* and *Morpheus*, there was a *Citadel* piece and one on *Lemmings* as well.**

**RK:** I'm just trying to think whether they did start with Chris Anderson's three issues. I don't think so anyway, so that would be Gary Penn; he and Julian using their enthusiastic contacts with programmers. They reckoned they'd be a pretty interesting article for *Zzap!* readers. I didn't have any hand in it; as the editor I just oversaw what they got.


» Oliver Frey

**RG: Did you find with Gary as editor at the time it allowed you to be more hands-off and not have to do as much as you did with *Crash* when it first started?**

**RK:** Absolutely, yes. I mean, *Crash* was incredibly hard work. *Zzap!* was already three issues up and both Gary and Julian knew what they were doing – or, perhaps more importantly, they knew what they wanted to do. We just talked over ideas like the diaries and I said, 'Well fine, you've got the contact. Go get them.' So it was much easier for me. It wasn't exactly hands-off for the first three issues that I did of *Zzap!*, but after that it was fairly clear that I took a more editorial management role really. Gary Penn had this sort of weird thing that he'd have his C64 on a screen and his Apricot computer next to it and papers piled up in a kind of semicircle so that sometimes it looked like he was in an organ loft playing the organ. There was this sort of tall wall of paper stretching away from it. So I had to keep reminding him that he'd lose things if he didn't file it. No, he organised a great deal of the material that was not necessarily game reviews, and more or less fed me the mail they felt Lloyd Mangram had to answer, which was me.

**RG: As you'd already had one successful magazine under your belt, were there any particular dos and don'ts you wanted to apply to *Zzap!*?**

**RK:** No, I don't think so. Partly it was making sure that the tone of *Zzap!* was a bit like *Crash*. Obviously it was different in its own ways. But that the spirit of, how should we put it… that seriousness with irreverence, that carried on. But then quite honestly both Gary and Julian, and even more so shortly afterwards Gary Liddon, were kind of built that way anyway.

**Oliver Frey**: It became slightly more robust than *Crash*, I think, in tone.

**RK:** Yes, I agree.

**RG: Would you say it took a slightly more mature approach?**

**RK:** I think it did just because on *Crash* we had the schoolboy pool of reviewers, whereas *Zzap!* was all in-house. That was just the two Garys, Julian and a little later Dominic Handy (aka Paul Sumner).

**RG: What do you think were the strengths of having a core team?**

**RK:** It was much more integrated. It meant that everything that was going into the magazine was discussed on a monthly editorial basis, and then weekly and then daily. And we were able to review everything pretty instantly the minute it was written, and did take a function of sort of saying it's overlong, or perhaps it's getting bogged down with this detail. Whereas with *Crash* the reviews particularly would be coming in ad-hoc during the month, so there was a bit more control with *Zzap!*.

**RG: Who came up with the idea of the Sizzler?**

**RK:** That was Chris Anderson. It seemed a natural fit with the two Zs for *Zzap!*.

**RG: You mentioned that Gary and Julian had a good relationship with software houses. How much pressure did you receive to give good scores to games?**

**RK:** Well, there was always pressure. The most naked form of pressure was 'we won't advertise unless we get a reasonable review'. I don't think that happened an awful lot and perhaps more with *Crash*, in fact, than it did in *Zzap!*. I know it was cited in Anthony Caulfield's film [*The Newsfield Years*], Franco [Frey] saying he certainly came under pressure on the commercial end, but the answer was usually the same. For *Crash* you couldn't really go round to a bunch of school kids and say, 'Your reviews aren't giving a good enough rating because the advertisers aren't happy', because they were school kids; they just weren't going to



Editorial: Julian Rignall, Gary Liddon, Gary Penn, Roger Kean.

ZZAP! ISSUE 14

## FREY ON FREY



**"A 'team' picture** celebrating a new high in circulation figures for *Zzap!* – the UK's biggest-selling Commodore mag! The fact that we felt we could replace a game with our editorial team on the cover reflects on how popular they'd become with readers. It was a celebration of the magazine's success, and I still like it."

# THE MAKING OF ZZAP! 64



bow to that pressure. Even more so with *Zzap!* because Gary Liddon, Gary Penn and Julian Rignall were just too bolshie to believe that they could be bought or alter their reviews for advertising.

The other form of pressure, which was more subtle and sometimes effective beneficially, was that software houses took to coming to Ludlow to preview games and get the guys that were going to review them to say what they thought was good and bad about them. And they'd go away and make alterations based on the recommendations that probably someone like Julian would make. What's subtle about that, of course, is it starts to build a relationship between reviewer, software house and game that you start feeling, 'Well, I think I'm going to be just a weenie bit kinder than I might have been.' I think that probably resulted in some slightly better reviews occasionally, but not very much.

**RG: With regards to the covers, they were once again drawn by Oliver Frey. On *Crash* there were obviously a few covers that caused a little bit of controversy due to their styling. Did you experience any similar problems with *Zzap!*?**

**OF:** Well, the *Zzap!* team were quite belligerent in the sort of ideas they had for covers. Maybe not quite so controversial like the *Barbarian* cover on *Crash*, but I always remember doing the *Leaderboard* cover – that wasn't my idea at all. That came up because we were accused by the editor of a rival magazine of being a fluffy lollipop magazine, so we proved him right. [laughs]

**RK:** Well, that issue it was definitely going to be US Gold's *Leaderboard* on the cover, and the problem with golf is it's a bit boring to use as a cover image, and I think I came up with the notion of, 'Let's answer back to the fluffy lollipop magazine comment. Why don't we have this sexy girl licking her lollipop very provocatively with all these gawking boys standing behind her not looking at the golf at all?' And Gary thought that was a great idea, Julian loved it and so we went ahead with it. I mean it was controversial, I suppose, in that sense, but what was great about it was the unique way of putting a golf game on a magazine cover as well. It was a very striking image.






» Rignalls: Julian and younger brother Jonathan, who soon joined Newsfield in the production dept and by 1991 became MD.

**RG: Was there much collaboration with the editorial team when coming up with covers?**

**OF:** I think it varied a bit, but usually Julian and Gary Penn were quite visual and interested in the covers, so we would discuss it quite a bit, and then I'd go off and do a rough sketch. I think, if I remember mostly, they approved all little changes that were made. Actually it was quite good collaborating with them on covers.

**RG: What was the cover selection process like?**

**RK:** I remember it being easy all the way through *Zzap!*. There were very few of those very complicated notions of merging two, maybe even three, games. Gary and Julian generally settled on a game and said, 'That's what we're having, that's what's going on the cover, now how do we make it work?'

**RG: So, Oli, what do you feel was the best *Zzap!* cover you did and why?**



» Oliver presenting reader awards for *Little Computer People*.

**OF:** I don't have a 'best'; just a lot of good ones. One that springs to mind is issue 3, *Metro Force*, where I got to do a 'real' sci-fi painting. It took me quite some time, but worked out great. So many others spring to mind. The good thing was when, by issue 4, the editorial team moved to Ludlow. Gary Penn and Julian Rignall, and later reviewers, were never short of ideas, which made it a fun process!

**RG: Conversely, which one do you feel is the worst?**

**OF:** There you have me – if there were an obvious one I'd be sure to remember it, wouldn't I? But I can't. There will always be covers that one's less pleased with than others, usually because one has not quite managed to do justice to the subject due to lack of creative juices or sheer time constraints. Oddly, I never thought the cover for *Zzap!64* issue 1 was very good; it wasn't iconic enough for a launch issue.

**RG: And how difficult did you find the redesign that happened in issue 4?**

**OF:** The redesign was mainly editorial – ratings boxes, etc. All I had to do was add the new 'reviewer faces' as they arrived. My work became more interesting because I got live interaction with the team now that they were in Ludlow, and the guys were free to voice their own thoughts directly; before that I was only briefed on the phone by Chris Anderson – there was no 'instant' email then!

**RG: We interviewed Gary recently. He's quite a colourful character and Julian Rignall is also well known for sticking to his guns and getting his opinion across. What was it like working with those kind of guys who were obviously so passionate about what they did?**

**RK:** I think after about a year and a quarter of running *Crash* they were a breath of fresh air. We had a lot of fun really. There was a lot of stress because people were often working weekends and nights, as I'm sure you are aware when deadlines were pressing. But no, it was great fun.

They were very good to work with, and they were full of ideas. Like when we came up with the art gallery when people started sending in their C64 art done on their computers. We had such a pile of it, and I can't remember who suggested that they should go in as a feature, but I came up with the notion of [treating] them as serious bits of art and having somebody who is actually a real art expert using art jargon to introduce each picture.

Then Gary Liddon came up with the notion of The Shadow, which Gary Penn picked up particularly; he liked that too. Julian was not

## FREY ON FREY

ZZAP! ISSUE 21

**"A 'Christmas Special'**, which I enjoyed. We'd promised a competition winner he'd appear on the cover, and there he is as part of the choir! Left to right: 'Paul Sumner' (Dominic Handy), Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and our reader wassailing from the hymn sheet with the back cover promoting LM. I got them to pose for photos!"



## OLD FACES

### GARY PENN



**Then:** ***Zzap!64* editor**
**Now: Head of development, Denki**

**How did you get your job on *Zzap!64*?**
By not winning *PCG* magazine's competition to find Britain's best gamer. Well, not quite. Chris Anderson was the magazine's editor and when *PCG* was closed and he launched *Zzap!* for Newsfield, he wanted writers who could play games – or gamers who could write – to give the magazine real credibility. At that time the journalists were professional, sure, but not gamers, not like the likes of Julian and me who played everything we could get our hands on – and, in Julian's case, played with exceptional ability. So Chris approached us and offered us jobs after we passed a writing test. I believe I wrote a review of Epyx's *Summer Games*. That led to an interview with Chris and the next thing I know I'm working on the launch issue of what was to become a historically significant magazine down in Yeovil, Somerset.

**What's your fondest memory about working on the magazine?**
I have no overriding fondest memory of the time. The initial rush of having access to so many new games, especially the unreleased ones – that was fantastic for about the first four or five months and then intermittently special with key releases. The shows and events, mixing with the people who made and played the games – that never got old. The family vibe within *Zzap!* and Newsfield – the indivisible work, rest and play; the ups and downs. That was something unique, too.

There was the very comfortable relationship we had with the whole industry, especially the makers. Again, there was negligible delineation between what was formal and what was social – well, until it came to the reviews, which we took very seriously. And then, of course, there's the relationship with the readers: we were them and they were us. We treated everyone the same – gave everyone the same chances, anyway. There was a point when *Zzap!* became such a focal point for the industry and audience – that was probably the best time, but that's the time I don't remember so well. Even so, there was a lot to like back then.

**What's the best piece of editorial that you ever wrote for the magazine?**
To be honest I'd have to go back through all the issues and see if anything stood out. I know I enjoyed the reaction to the *World Cup Carnival* review. I vaguely recall that *The Sentinel* felt like a turning point for me. It was like nothing else at the time; it consumed me like no other game and I couldn't feel a rating – usually you'd have a rough feeling about what it was worth and then argue about it and refine the detail, but with *The Sentinel* I had no idea what it was worth. Some of the editorials you could read now and they wouldn't feel dated. Some things never change.

**Why do you think *Zzap!64* remains so popular with fans?**
I'm not sure why it's endured with such fervour but I can tell you why I think it worked so well at the time: it had a pure, true, honest feel to it; it felt like it was written by gamers for gamers. By people who lived and breathed games; people who cared passionately about games, especially quality games, and the people who made those games.

We didn't stop at the publishers like everyone else. We went beyond, beneath the surface and straight to the real reason those games existed; we gave respectful coverage to the authors of the games. We were genuinely interested in what the people behind the games did and how they did it. We didn't treat anyone differently just because they were a publisher with money or a developer or a reader. I know if I wasn't working on *Zzap!* I'd have read it with respect, dedication and appreciation. It was rough and ready but it had such a vibrancy.



» Zzap! Launch: Chris Anderson, Denise Roberts, Bob Wade, Matthew Uffindell and Oliver Frey.

so happy with that but those two went away and worked on it, and it was a lot of fun coming up with all those different ways to cover games with articles like The Shadow and Gary Liddon's absurd Dim Dim, the Rubber Fish of Stupidity. All these things are sort of peripheral to games but made the magazine what it was.

**RG: Were there any arguments regarding the scores awarded by *Crash* and *Zzap!* reviewers?**
**RK:** As I recall, when the *Crash* reviews were done – because the magazines worked quite independently, there was almost no collusion between them – that would come up when the issues came back. And the *Crash* people would say, 'Well, it wasn't that good,' and then you'd get someone like Julian saying, 'Look at that stupid rubber-keyed thing! Look at it on the Commodore! It's much better.'

**RG: So was there any rivalry between the two magazines? And can you recall any anecdotes?**
**RK:** Oh, huge. Yes, all the time. Well, the rubber band fights were the most spectacular. We had three floors with a very huge sort of Victorian winding staircase, so ambushing was regular. It never came to fisticuffs. [laughs]

**RG: *Zzap!* had covertapes at a later stage. What was the reasoning behind introducing them?**
**RK:** Market forces. I think probably the first culprit to put a free game on the cover was *Your Spectrum*. Emap was quick to follow, and Future, and we more or less had to do the same. You were always under pressure from the distributor saying, 'Well, look what the rivals are doing, so what are you going to do about it?' I guess we had an advantage, both *Crash* and particularly *Zzap!* as well, that Gary and Julian got on very well with software houses, so they were able to get a reasonable deal out of them to put old games on the cover. It was not particularly a departure any of us at Newsfield wanted to do, but there seemed no way round it at the time. Even if you got a fairly good deal out of one, two, three software houses, that was still a rather large expense to pay them, mastering the tapes, packaging them, adding the bags that naturally had to come with the magazine, and that budget had to come out of somewhere, and, of course, ultimately it came out of the number of pages. Also, we wanted the magazine to speak for itself, and didn't really want it to become something where people went to buy the tape over the magazine attached to it.
**OF:** Mind you, this was the end result, though, of the pressure we had been under early on with *Crash*. Every issue had to offer more and more money and competitions, which the distributor thought helped sell the magazine. So there was always a scramble to try and assemble as many competitions with as high a value in prizes as possible. So in a funny sort of way, the cassettes were just another step forward when the competitions weren't quite enough.

**RG: Why do you think magazines like *Crash* and *Zzap!* were so well loved by pretty much everyone who read them?**
**RK:** Well, I suppose there are a number of reasons. Both of them got to pretty hefty monthly sales, so a lot of people were buying them and four times as many people were reading them. Mostly I just think they were the first two magazines into the market that were dedicated to the games and the reviewing. The reviews were so detailed but everything that went on around them made them more a lifestyle.

It was quite humbling, actually, at Replay to have so many people coming up, both *Crash* and *Zzap!* readers, and saying, 'I often get the binders out

ZZAP! ISSUE 71

## FREY ON FREY

**"A sexy take** on the 'glamorous' Monaco Grand Prix, complete with a phallic racing car strategically powering into the foreground! Subtle, or what?"



# OLD FACES

## PHIL KING



**Then: *Zzap!64* staff writer**
**Now: Freelance writer and sub editor**

**How did you get your job at *Zzap!64*?**
I was already working as a staff writer on *Crash* magazine in the same building. Yes, I was originally a Spectrum fan who moved over to 'the other side'. It was all a bit strange how I came to be working for *Zzap!*. I was actually off work with a broken ankle, which I got after falling off my nephew's skateboard – I was never any good at skating. I got a call from work saying I'd been moved onto *Zzap!*. It seems that there was some sort of falling out between the existing team and the management and most of them – Gordon, Kati and Maff – had left, leaving only Randy. So I joined the new *Zzap!* team along with Stuart Wynne and Robin Hogg.

**What's your fondest memory about working on the magazine?**
I have many fond memories, but what sticks in my mind is the camaraderie between the team in those early days. We really all got on so well. I also remember playing *Kick Off* an awful lot – I've always been a fan of football games and was known at the time as 'Footy Phil', or sometimes 'Fatty Phil' – not sure why, since I was never that porky. We had a lot of fun in the office.

**What's the best piece of editorial that you ever wrote for the magazine?**
To be honest, I can't remember much about exactly what I wrote. I do remember reviewing joysticks, though, and testing their robustness by literally throwing them out of a first-floor window. I also wrote the adventure reviews, under the name Norman Nutz; previously I'd performed a similar role on *Crash*, taking over the persona of the female character Samara – which was a bit weird.

**Why do you think *Zzap!* remains so popular with fans?**
I suppose people grew up with it and remember it fondly from their youth. I think there was a fun, madcap element to it, too. We got away with some crazy things in those days – including replacing Stuart as editor with the alien Scorelord, who even had his own review cartoons. We were just mates having a lot of fun and producing a magazine at the same time.

and read them from end to end and they're still wonderful to read.' And I'm not so sure many of the rival magazines were as intense and involving as *Crash* and *Zzap!* were.

**OF:** Well, there was one visitor who actually said reading *CVG* you could do it in two hours flat and you wouldn't want to read it again, whereas *Zzap!* would take you a lot longer to read and then you'd start all over again the next day.

**RK:** Several people said that, and then would start again because they still had a week to fill in before the next issue came out. So there was obviously that huge loyalty. I think another aspect actually – and probably one exception would be *Your Sinclair* – is that almost all the other magazines, at least for ages, never responded to the readers. They might have letters pages but they just sort of published the letter with perhaps an odd response from the editor, whereas *Crash* and *Zzap!* answered back. Lloyd Mangram wasn't always kind in his answers. So it created almost a kind of Facebook post comment feel that was definitely lacking from almost all the other magazines in the market.

**RG: Can you tell us about the reviews? What was the actual review process? How long did they typically take?**

**OF:** I recall things like *Forbidden Forest* being played for days. And then arguments between the team as to whether it was any good, or just how good. Others obviously less so, where for some reason or another minds were made up quite quickly as to what the game was worth.

**RK:** It's worth remembering that the three core members of early to middle *Zzap!* – Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and Gary Liddon – were ace games players. There are articles in *Zzap!*, the *Zzap!* Challenge, where some kid would come along to Ludlow and fight against Julian Rignall and Julian would lose, but it was very rare indeed. Games that were worthy of it really got played pretty much to the end before finalising the review. I mean, the team would take turns writing up the basic review – the easy bit, so to speak, to describe it. But the debates over which I was often called in to mediate on the various merits of the game, all those aspects that went into the reviews – the gameplay, difficulty levels, all those sorts of things we rated – would often have varying opinions. And that was all right because, of course, each of them could write their personal opinion, but trying to rationalise their various views into an overall system rating was often, unless everybody agreed, fraught business and took hours and hours.

**RG: What do you feel *Zzap!* offered over the other Commodore 64 magazines on the market?**

**RK:** A lot more pages, a lot more insight into the game, a lot more games reviewed every month, and above all attitude, and that personal touch – that letters and tips did get answered; they weren't just printed and that's it. They always got an answer if they went in the magazine.

**RG: Was there much of a transition when *Zzap!* started covering games on the Amiga?**

**RK:** The Amiga didn't have a clear place to go somehow in our thinking, and yet it seemed unwise to ignore it. But it wasn't a particularly happy union and I'm not sure how many issues we did before it got dropped again. And we did, of course, consider the notion of an Amiga-only magazine, which was *Amiga Force*. So no, Newsfield really sort of touched on the Amiga but didn't go into it in too much detail. Although under Stuart Wynne's editorship there was a lot of Amiga coverage as well.

**RG: When Thalamus started publishing games, some of its releases, such as *Hawkeye*, were deemed to have scored higher than they deserved. And some people say to this day that it's because of the connection between *Zzap!* and Thalamus. Would you say there was anything to that?**





» Proof that *Crash* tipster Robin Candy was a traitor…

## FREY ON FREY

**ZZAP! ISSUE 90**



**"This was the** last *Zzap!* cover before the magazine turned into Commodore Force. The cover was a clever use of a centrefold poster on a complete reviews round-up of C64 film licences, a picture I enjoyed doing. It was quite a job assembling all the stars and bits of movies into a pleasing composition."



**RK:** It's hard to say after time but my recollection then was that Thalamus product wasn't going to be treated any better than anyone else's in the magazine.

**OF:** If anything, for example, *Hawkeye* benefited from the fact that Stavros Fasoulas, who programmed it, did visit the offices quite a bit and he did seem to get on quite well with the team, so it could have rubbed off slightly that way. But, to be fair, *Hawkeye* got good reviews elsewhere too.

**RK:** It seems to me that nearly all of the Thalamus products got very good reviews in *CVG* and other magazines. In fact, interestingly, it was Julian Rignall who introduced Stavros Fasoulas to us and said, 'He's got this game *Sanction* and I think it's really good. You should have a look at it, and I don't see why Electronic Arts or Activision or anybody should have it; why don't we do it?' And the immediate reaction to that was, 'We're a magazine. We can't run a software house.' But he was pretty pushy on it, and then Gary got behind it and said, 'It is a really good game. It isn't finished yet but we should do it.' And in the end we were swayed by their decision and pressure on that to form a software house. And in terms of Newsfield versus Thalamus, Gary Liddon was really desperate to go and work on that, because he always wanted to be a programmer, and we said at the time, 'Well, you can't be a reviewer any longer. Basically you'll have to give *Zzap!* up if you want to do that, and if you do want to do that then do it with our blessing.'

**RG: When did you realise that it would all be over for *Zzap!* magazine and that you'd have to close it down?**

**RK:** Well, of course *Zzap!* did carry over for a few issues into Impact Magazines, the Europress Group company, but the distributors' attitude then was that we started *Sega Force* and *N-Force* and you couldn't really then have *Zzap!* sitting there comfortably with it; it would have to be *Zzap! Force* or something, and the decision was taken over our heads that the magazine would have to become *Commodore Force*. But clearly the 8-bit market was dwindling badly, and it didn't look like it had that much time to go before it was no longer going to be viable.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that hardcore *Zzap!* readers were disappointed in *Commodore Force*, the young team who worked on it worked very hard and very well and I don't think it was at all a bad magazine. By then sales had dropped from the heights of 90,000 a month to 12,000 a month, and going down every month, and hardly any ad revenue. But *Commodore Force*, or *Zzap!* in its *Commodore Force* form, did last until the end of Impact Magazines in March '94. Whereas with *Crash* I came in one day to discover I had a memo saying *Crash* is being swapped for an Emap magazine, an Amiga magazine. So we lost *Crash* just overnight like that; it went on to be joined with *Sinclair User* for one issue, and the Europress Group's Amiga magazine got enlarged with the one they'd swapped it for.

**RG: Finally, looking back, what are your fondest memories of being involved in *Zzap!*?**

**RK:** So many. But for me working with Gary, Julian and Gary Liddon. It was just a great time.

**OF:** A bit of that as well, of course. It's not so much any instance, but it's just the fact I was quite pleased that *Zzap!* took on its own character. At the beginning, when it was first launched by Chris Anderson in Yeovil, I always felt Newsfield didn't have that much control over it because obviously Chris Anderson had his own ideas, which on the surface definitely tied in with ours. Once it moved to Ludlow, and on the whole the writing team was given more freedom than they'd ever had, it all blossomed in a strange sort of way. Unlike *Crash*, it was completely different.

# OLD FACES

## MARK KENDRICK



**Then: Art editor**

**Now: Group creative director, Imagine Publishing**

**Is it true that you're the longest-serving member of the *Zzap!* team? How did this come about?**

I started work for Newsfield Publications on *Zzap!64* from issue 19, which was in production during September 1986. I was actually two hours late on my first day of work due to my car breaking down on Clee Hill. Not a good start to my publishing career! Once I got into the office the 'Twiddling with Twiddy' feature was my first work, actually! From that point on I continually designed on *Zzap!64*, crafting its design development through the inclusion of Amiga content in issue 43, working through the controversial 'all change' of editorial staff in issue 50, and following the collapse of Newsfield Publications in 1991 I recall having two days to get the mag back on the shelves with issue 79. I continued to work on the title until its final issue, 90, and was then responsible for the design of its replacement title, *Commodore Force*, in November 1992. I continued work on the magazine while working on other Impact Magazine projects until the company finally closed in February 1994. So, in answer to your question, I believe I am indeed the longest-serving 'non-director' staff member of *Zzap!64*. Cool, huh?

**Did you have any input into covers?**

I didn't have any involvement with Oli's covers really. Although I did work on a potential *Garfield* cover back in I think 1987, which I painted and was planned to go ahead while Oli was on holiday, but thankfully Oli was back in time and so my cover work never materialised. After all, the whole idea of Oli's style was to bring a unique look to our magazine titles, and his amazing artwork did this in spades. I think it's fair to say that there was and has never been a computer magazine brand with such a strong sense of cover style, bar perhaps *Super Pro*.

**What was the atmosphere like in the *Zzap!* office?**

It was a riot. Unprofessional, crazy, creative and amazing all at the same time back in the mid-Eighties. When you read the stories about what it was like working at Newsfield in the Eighties, they are not exaggerated. It's all true… and more! People there lived it, and it showed in the magazines. It wasn't a job, but more a way of life then. There was a lot of late-night working, partying, general insanity. No joke, but people used to take their parents on holiday to Ludlow so they could visit our offices, hang outside and get us to sign their magazines. It was like being in a rock band with all the fans. It was truly a brilliant time to be into magazine publishing and in particular the emerging phenomenon of computer gaming. Wild times. I should write a book one day on it, but I'd probably be sued, even though they'd know it was all true!

**You worked on both *Zzap!64* and *Crash*. Were there many differences between the two magazines?**

There were differences, yes. Particularly with magazine tone, and I think that attracted a different type of person to work on each title. I was lucky enough to work across both key brands so experienced both mindsets. *Crash* was more serious and straight-laced. It was all about the games and was very committed to its review policy. *Zzap!64*, on the other hand, was still utterly committed to review policy, but was far more a party. The personalities on *Zzap!64* were, I think it's fair to say, much more larger than life and into the whole 'it's a wild ride', as opposed to it being a serious job, particularly before issue 50. That's how I saw it, anyway.

**Why do you think *Zzap!* remains so popular with readers?**

I think *Zzap!64* has such an enduring quality with fans because it had personality. It depicted a world of fun gaming, which was new and sexy at the time. That, coupled with strong writing personalities fronting the magazine, made it more like a TV show in printed form. So what young kid wouldn't want to be part of that crazy, wild, exciting world of gaming and fun? Plus, I like to think that it was pretty damn good design too, which helped sell the package!



# Minority Report

Gaming has its world-beaters. Just as interesting, though, are platforms and titles that, but for fate, could have been serious contenders. Rory Milne looks at some great gaming on less-familiar systems, and some underappreciated classics on better-known hardware



## IRONCLAD

■ SYSTEM: NEO GEO CD ■ DEVELOPER: SAURUS ■ YEAR: 1996

» NEO GEO CD



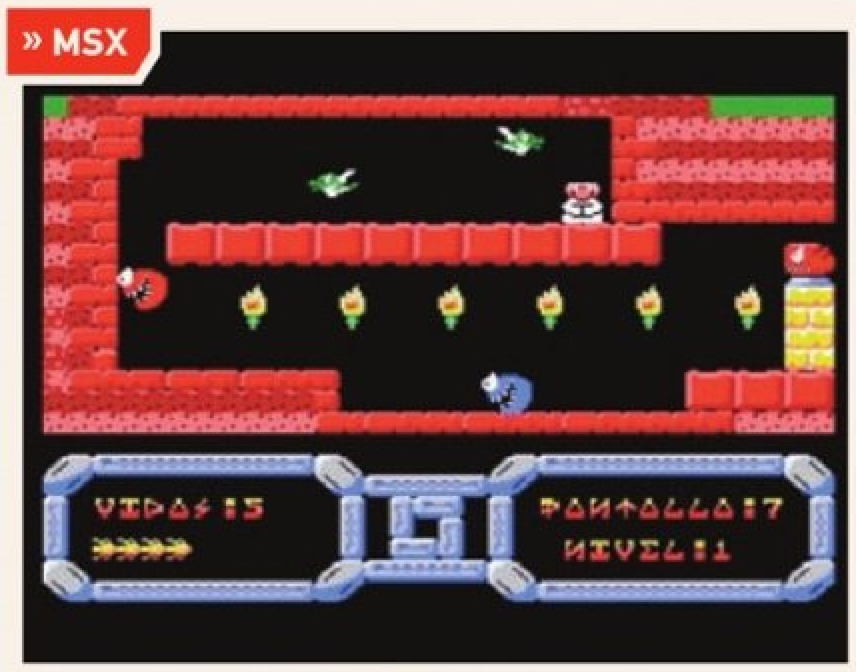

» [Neo Geo CD] A tense showdown with a trio of self-replicating robotic crabs.

■ **On release, the pros and cons of SNK's cartridge-based Neo Geo** AES were pretty clear: arcade-quality gaming in your living room, but at an astronomical price. A few years later, however, the Neo Geo's manufacturing costs and the price of CD-ROM technology had come down, and SNK saw an opportunity to launch a more affordable model that ran cheaper games: the Neo Geo CD. Sadly, its lethargic CD-ROM drive's lengthy loading times led to little success, and the system saw few exclusives. One of note, though, is *Ironclad*, an entertaining and visually impressive shooter with a great soundtrack and excellent replay value.

*Ironclad* is a game that gets a lot of things right. Lavish pre-rendered backgrounds offer a wide variety of scenery, detailed sprites are skilfully **designed and realised, and thumping synth rock/classical/industrial music** complements the action perfectly. Power-ups come in a mouth-watering range of flavours, and multiple options provide ample incentive for repeated play. You get easy, normal and hard modes, a choice of three planes, and numerous paths to choose from as you advance through the levels.

Options aside, your mission is to fight your way through an entire army of machines, each sector guarded by an armoured, mechanised boss that you must defeat to progress. Initially, you have light weaponry, an emergency hyper-bomb that destroys all on-screen minor foes, and a detachable robot. The latter acts as a shield and boosts your weapons when attached, or as an attack drone when detached. Before long, however,

» MSX

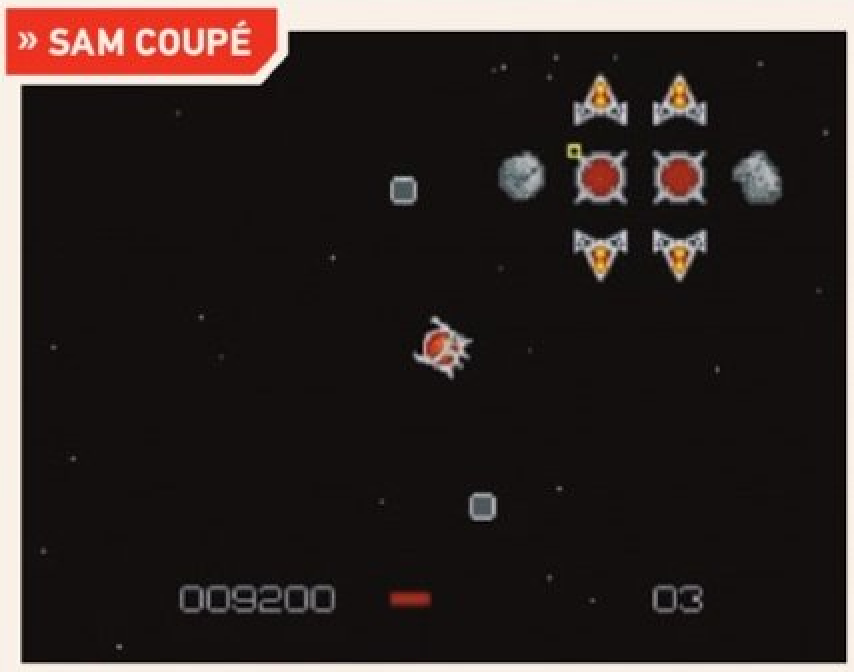


## » TEMPTATIONS

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: TOPO SOFT ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **In this sprawling** platformer, Noni the monk must vanquish hordes of demons as a test to gain entry to the Vitigudina order. Noni is bestowed with ten lives, but given the difficulty of traversing each screen, that's no bad thing. Hidden power-ups are essential to progress but are only revealed by shooting seemingly innocent objects. Smoothly animated demons, meanwhile, must be evaded or accurately targeted as they zip around each screen. Excellent use is made of the hardware, with the result being colourful, detailed characters and backdrops, while play is cerebral and offers balanced platforming.

» SAM COUPÉ




## » DYZONIUM

■ SYSTEM: SAM COUPÉ
■ DEVELOPER: FRED PUBLISHING ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **You're on a** voyage to collect crystals from the ten zones of a far-off galaxy. Unfortunately, this involves blasting or dodging their mutant guardians, and although power-ups temporarily increase your firepower, one life and a rapidly reducing energy bar make your task difficult. The game is viewed top-down, with eight-way scrolling, attractive sprites, atmospheric sound and an impressive wireframe 'game over' sequence that you see repeatedly. As well as collisions and enemy fire, watch for being caught in explosions of your own making. This is a polished shooter, but it's unapologetically hard.

» WONDERSWAN



## » KAZE NO KLONOA: MOONLIGHT MUSEUM

■ SYSTEM: WONDERSWAN
■ DEVELOPER: NAMCO ■ YEAR: 1999

■ **A novel mechanic** is employed in this surreal platformer. You have to grab and inflate opponents, then utilise their bloated condition for aerial transport, to perform double jumps, or to bowl things over. The titular museum's five worlds each contain six dreamlike 'visions', which you overcome by solving puzzles in order to find three stars. Higher areas are accessed by stacking crates or jumping on balloons, while doors are unlocked with matching keys. Simply put, this is thoughtful, well-designed gaming.



» [Neo Geo CD] In hot pursuit of a jet-powered armoured chicken.




» [Neo Geo CD] A forest pool reflects the moon, as a missile-laden UFO powers up.






**» ABOUT THE SYSTEM**

- The Neo Geo CD was released four years after its expensive cartridge-based predecessor, the Neo Geo AES.
- The price was right, but it suffered from slow loading times.
- The system's library largely consisted of ports from the MVS and AES, but it did get a few worthwhile exclusives.

you can upgrade with power-ups as diverse as flame bursts, lightning bolts and heat-seeking missiles.

It's probably just as well that the in-game armoury is well stocked, as the creative assortment of metallic commanders at the end of each stage require serious firepower to take down. Among their ranks are a self-replicating robotic crab, a jet-powered armoured chicken, an insane mech preacher, and their imposing, mysterious, metal-caped leader.

Swarms of ground and air troops complete his army, stranger recruits being frog droids and sentient mines floating from party balloons, with more predictable combatants in helicopters, planes, jeeps and tanks.

The occupied lands you attempt to traverse are represented by often-breathtaking, multilayered, animated backgrounds. There are cloud-dusted forests with pools of water reflecting the moon, stark nuclear wastelands, and industrial plants thick with dust and vents, shooting flames.

Granted, *Ironclad* doesn't rewrite any rulebooks. It's perhaps less demanding than other side-scrolling shmups of the time and doesn't make any massive innovations, but the alternate routes, variously equipped planes and choice of difficulty levels help add serious longevity. The eclectic soundtrack works seamlessly and is testament to the care taken in matching the score to the mood of each scene. Just the fact that *Ironclad* has moods is a mark of the effort put into a straightforward shooter. Paradoxically, then, perhaps what makes *Ironclad* great is that it doesn't attempt to do anything special.




» [Neo Geo CD] At war with the metal-caped leader as his empire burns.

» TI-99/4A




# » SPACE BANDITS

■ SYSTEM: TI-99/4A
■ DEVELOPER: MILTON BRADLEY ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Using a top-down** perspective, but with movement into and out of the screen, this unusual maze shooter charges you with retrieving energy crystals. Take care of uncollected crystals turning white and becoming lethal, of androids firing antigravity spray that leads to a spirally demise, and of zapping droids with your vapour gun, as this creates deadly, passage-blocking energy. As the droid count is ratcheted up, you quickly find yourself with little room to manoeuvre. Visually, a balance is struck between effective and attractive, while gameplay is original and compulsive in equal measure.

» AMSTRAD CPC



# » BACTRON

■ SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC
■ DEVELOPER: LORICIEL ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **Seldom mentioned, despite** great visuals, audio and gameplay, *Bactron* offers slick, addictive gaming. You play an antibiotic blob, attempting to rid its host of viruses by reactivating enzymes. Every virus drains your limited energy while demanding a different defence strategy: spiders can be avoided with nimble footwork; spinning tops and sombreros trapped behind barriers or immobilised with spit; and lethargic cells weaved through. Enzymes replenish your health, blue doppelgangers have the opposite effect, and inanimate objects can be pushed around. A challenging title, but you keep coming back for more.

» BBC MICRO B




# » PANDEMONIUM

■ SYSTEM: BBC MICRO B (ALSO ON ACORN ELECTRON)
■ DEVELOPER: SUPERIOR SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **Somewhere in a** vast, primary-coloured land, 12 pieces of a core must be collected while steering clear of or zapping the manically energetic denizens. As an aid to travel, telephone kiosks, each with their own number, can be transported between, but to discover a kiosk's number you first have to visit it. Energy and weaponry are metered, so careful conservation of each is required, especially as extra lives are in short supply and difficult to reach. Progression proves challenging but always fair, while the visuals, music and effects are the equal of the great platforming on offer.



# THE HISTORY OF DRAGON

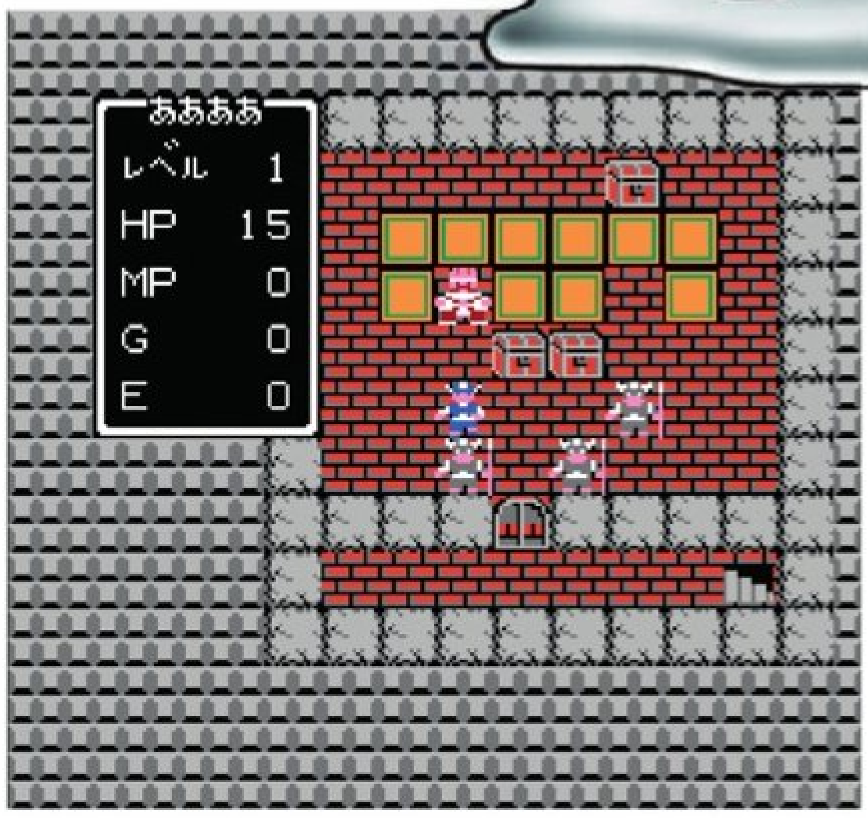



**Final Fantasy may be bigger but Dragon Quest is more important. Enix's seminal console RPG kick-started a genre in Japan and is as beloved by the nation as no other game. To celebrate the milestone that is the series' 25th anniversary, Ashley Day speaks to Dragon Quest creator Yuji Horii about the making of a legend**



## Dragon Quest

**Format:** NES
**Also on:** MSX, PC-98, Sharp X68000, Super Famicom, Game Boy Color, Wii, Mobile
**Released:** 1986 (Japan), 1989 (US)
**Developed by:** Chunsoft







BOTH THE EPITOME of the great Japanese RPG and perhaps also *the* greatest Japanese RPG, *Dragon Quest* laid many of the foundations for the genre; blueprints that would be followed for decades to come. But like all role-playing games, *Dragon Quest*'s own origins can be traced back to the West, to computer role-playing games and to *Dungeons & Dragons*.

"I had been a great fan of Apple PC games, RPGs in particular, even before I was involved with the development of *Dragon Quest*," reveals Yuji Horii. "I found it extremely fascinating to be able to improve your capabilities while you are simply having a good time playing the game. However, although the RPG was such fun to play, RPG titles for PC back then were very challenging for ordinary gamers, as they often required complex game controls. This motivated me to create *Dragon Quest*, because I wanted those ordinary gamers to discover how much fun RPGs could be. In order to make *Dragon Quest* more accessible, I made the game controls as intuitive as possible and created a story that would help the player immerse himself into the in-game world."

*Dragon Quest* certainly was simple. It featured a typical 'rescue the princess' plot and an interface with commands so straightforward that they even included one to climb stairs. Yet this simplicity, plus *Dragon Quest*'s home on the most popular Japanese console of its time, the Famicom, endeared it to an audience that had no previous idea of what an RPG even was. The thrill of the epic, open world, the pulse-quickening threat of random battles, and the weeks-long pacing totally in contrast to the arcade-style games of the day opened gamers' eyes to a whole new interactive experience and secured *Dragon Quest*'s place in the story of videogames.

But this achievement wasn't Horii's alone. *Dragon Quest* was created and overseen by a team of three individuals who have remained together throughout the past 25 years, creating each of the nine main games in close collaboration. The two other men were Akira Toriyama, one of Japan's most loved comic artists and the creator of *Dragon Ball*, and Koichi Sugiyama, a long-established videogame composer. Horii explains how the dream team came together. "I was introduced to Mr Toriyama by [Kazuhiko Torishima], whom I had worked for before. He was an editor of *Weekly Boys' Jump* when I was writing photo-articles for the magazine. Mr Toriyama was already a household name, then famous for comics like *Dr Slump*, and Mr Torishima was the editor in charge of them. So it was sheer luck that I was linked to Mr Toriyama.

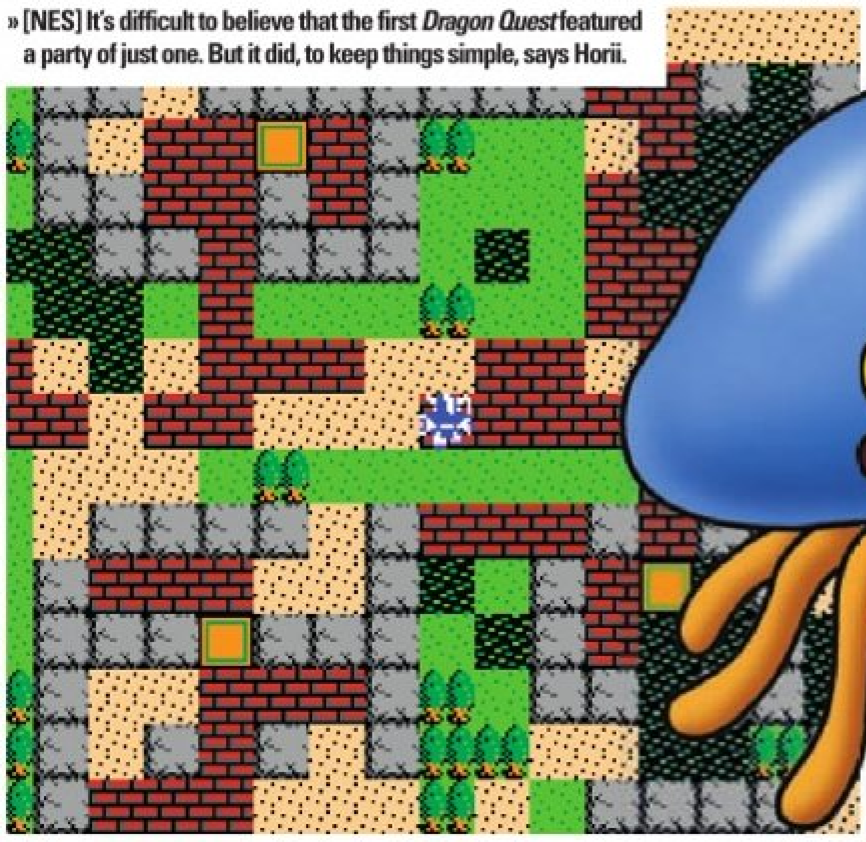
"As for Mr Sugiyama, he had been composing for games by Enix even before he began to write *Dragon Quest* music. He was a game enthusiast himself and, apparently, he initially started working for Enix after sending in a questionnaire postcard, which had been attached to an Enix game he had bought. We asked Mr Sugiyama to provide music for the project, and it was a decision made by [Yukinobu Chida], the producer of *Dragon Quest*.

"Mr Toriyama and Mr Sugiyama made such amazing contributions to *Dragon Quest*; great character designs and great music respectively. One of the reasons why we have been working together successfully for such an extended length of time may be that games we make together are invariably very approachable with a few small 'hooks' – something you will never feel tired of. This concept is also in *Dragon Quest* itself, of course."

> "Dragon Quest opened gamers' eyes to a whole new interactive experience and secured its place in the story of videogames"




» [NES] There's a certain charm to the first four games' visuals, granted, but we have to say they were basic even by the standards of the NES.



» [NES] It's difficult to believe that the first *Dragon Quest* featured a party of just one. But it did, to keep things simple, says Horii.





The original *Dragon Quest* never came here to Europe, leaving many to discover the game years later through emulation. But it did arrive in America, three years after its Japanese debut. Despite featuring improved visuals, in line with the then-released *Dragon Quest II* and *III*, the game initially sold poorly until Nintendo itself stepped in to give the renamed *Dragon Warrior* away to every new subscriber to its official *Nintendo Power* magazine. This Trojan horse of a giveaway put *Dragon Quest* into the hands of every loyal NES owner in the country and established the genre just in time for Square's *Final Fantasy* to arrive the next year. It also marked the beginning of an essential relationship with Nintendo that, while not a constant, has helped *Dragon Quest* reach new audiences many times since.

## Dragon Quest II: The Pantheon Of Evil

**Format:** NES
**Also on:** MSX, Game Boy Color, Super Famicom, Wii, Mobile
**Released:** 1987 (Japan), 1990 (US)
**Developed by:** Chunsoft

AS IMPORTANT AND influential as the original *Dragon Quest* was, it certainly didn't do everything, as Horii explains: "Although there were so many things we wanted to achieve with *Dragon Quest*, as far as the first title is concerned, we had to trim them off one after another because we only had a limited amount of memory to work with. We had to contrive ways to squeeze in the scenario, graphics and music within the memory limit, which was 64KB in those days."

One of the most unbelievable omissions from the first *Dragon Quest* was multi-member parties – a staple of the RPG going all the way back even to those games that inspired Horii. But he was determined to include them in the sequel, except, of course, with the mantra of accessibility at the forefront of everything he did. "We managed to include party gameplay for *Dragon Quest II*, which I would mention as the most important thing we achieved with the game. I expected that our fans would find it too much of a performance to play all three members of the party from the start. That is why the story was revealed in such a way to introduce the player gradually to the multi-member party system, where the number of party members increases by one at a time."

*Dragon Quest II*'s innovations didn't end there. One of the most interesting aspects of the adventure is that the princess, once rescued, joins your party as a permanent member. She may be underpowered, but this relatively active role was a huge step beyond the more traditional characters of the first game, while the fixed personalities and professionally written characters of the party were a world away from the unscripted, user-defined characters of Western computer RPGs, further defining the JRPG as a genre all its own.

## ROGUES' GALLERY



**LOTO**
The mythical hero of ancient times, referred to in legends throughout the events of the first two *Dragon Quest* games. At the end of *Dragon Quest III*, it's revealed that you've been playing as Loto all along. An extremely popular character, Loto – also called Erdrick in the US games – is referenced throughout the series.



**HERO**
*Dragon Quest*'s original 'Dragon Warrior', the Hero set the template for all *DQ* protagonists to come. Distinguished by his horned helmet, the silent protagonist was conceived as a conduit between player and game world, his lack of personality helping players to put themselves into the game.



**TORNEKO**
One of the playable characters in *Dragon Quest IV*, Torneko is a humble shopkeeper who sets out on a quest once he hears of the existence of a magical item that undoes that *DQ* tradition of losing half your cash upon death. Torneko later appeared as the main character in the first three *Mystery Dungeon* games.



**HERO (*DQV*)**
One of the best *DQ* characters in terms of the emotional bond he forms with the player, *Dragon Quest V*'s Hero goes through the pleasure of picking a wife from two lovely women and the sheer anguish of being turned to stone, unable to aid in the quest of his adult children.



**NERA**
A gentle mage from a wealthy background, Nera is the second potential bride in *Dragon Quest V* and meets the hero when he rescues her dog. If the player opts not to choose her then Nera later marries her childhood friend, Crispin.



**BIANCA**
One of the two women the player can marry in *Dragon Quest V*, Bianca is a herbalist and the homelier of the two spouses. Though the player is free to choose either bride, Bianca is the one the game encourages you to bond with.



**GABO**
One of the most interesting characters in *DQVII*, Gabo is a wolf turned into a boy. Retaining many of his animal qualities, he struggles to relate to the other characters, is always hungry, and benefits from some great skills, including heightened agility and a paralysing bite.



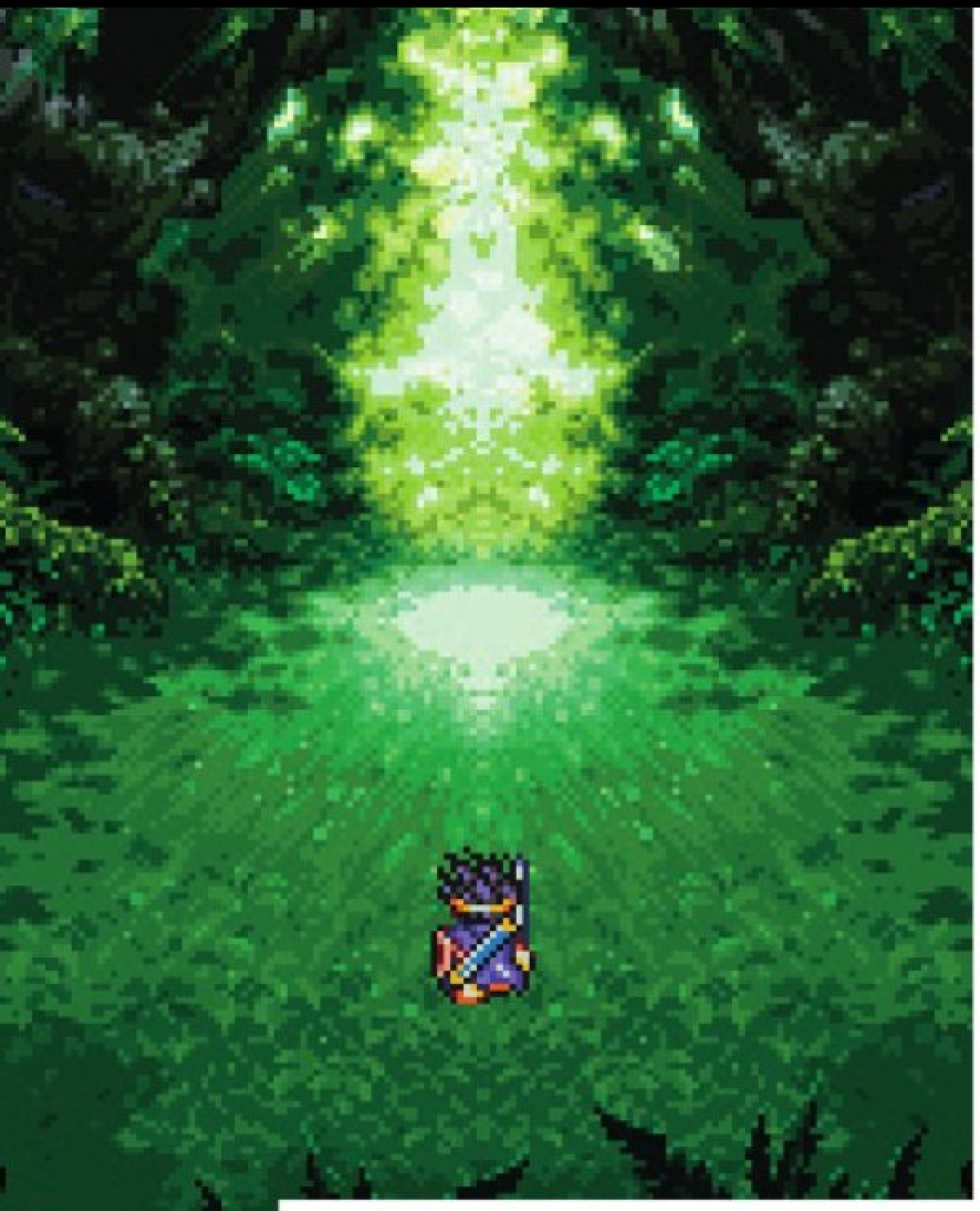
**KING TRODE**
The character referred to in the title of *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey Of The Cursed King*. King Trode has been turned into a goblin-like creature and is trying to reclaim his humanity along with his daughter, who has been turned into a horse.



**MELVIN**
*DQVII*'s Melvin once fought alongside God in a battle with the devil. He's a noble warrior, fascinated with the peaceful world. But his old-fashioned attitude to women sometimes gets the better of him.



**YANGUS**
A brash bandit trying to go straight, Yangus lends his formidable strength to the party of *Dragon Quest VIII*. Voiced in a comical, almost cockney fashion, Yangus repeatedly refers to the hero as 'guv' and is one of the most-liked characters in the series.



» [SNES] The first three games were all remade for the Super Famicom and look loads better. They were recently reissued on a Wii compilation.



## Dragon Quest III: Into The Legend

**Format:** NES
**Also on:** Super Famicom, Game Boy Color, Wii, Mobile
**Released:** 1988 (Japan), 1991 (US)
**Developed by:** Chunsoft

IF *DRAGON QUEST I* and *II* were the defining entries in Yuji Horii's series, then *Dragon Quest III* was the main event; a culmination of everything the team had been working toward. "More or less everything we originally wanted to achieve with *Dragon Quest* was achieved with *Dragon Quest III*," says Horii. "You can form your party as you wish, change your job and so forth. In that sense, the story of *Dragon Quest III* was smoothly linked to that of the first title, and I should imagine that is why *DQIII* left such a strong impression in the heart of many fans."

'Strong impression'. That's an understatement if ever there was one. During many years of meeting and interviewing Japanese game creators, the one title that's mentioned time and time again as a personal favourite is *Dragon Quest III*. The sheer affection for this title may come from the technological advancements, such as the day/night cycle, the jump to a four-character party system, or the new job system, as Horii suggests – but we're willing to bet that it has just as much to do with the innovative story. While *Dragon Quest II* was a direct sequel to its forebear, the events of *III* seemed unrelated to the previous two, right up until the end when the hero was revealed to be the Hero of Legend, heard of only in the mythological stories told by the townsfolk of the first two games.

Gameplay enhancements, a memorable story, and the addition of battery backup – a first for the Japanese releases in the series – made *DQIII* a firm favourite in its homeland and saw people take to the streets in their millions to buy the game, causing so much retail chaos that Enix was forced to release all future editions of *Dragon Quest* on a weekend. Horii remembers the moment he saw the madness for himself: "On the day *Dragon Quest III* was released, I took a train journey to witness the big queue while hiding myself from the fans. The frenzy was astonishing and yet I remember watching the queue as though it had nothing to do with me."

*Dragon Quest* had become a phenomenon.

## Dragon Quest IV: Chapters Of The Chosen

**Format:** NES
**Also on:** PlayStation, DS
**Released:** 1990 (Japan), 1992 (US), 2008 (Europe)
**Developed by:** Chunsoft

BY 1990, THE NES, and by extension the Famicom, was beginning to look a little long in the tooth. Major Japanese series like *Super Mario*, *Castlevania* and even *Final Fantasy* had moved on to Nintendo's successor, the Super Famicom/SNES. But not *Dragon Quest*.

"I had already had some ideas for *Dragon Quest IV* before completing the development of *DQIII*," says Horii. "It was still the heyday of the NES and so I did not really think I had other platforms to consider for the new project."

Yet with technological advancements a no-go, and *Dragon Quest*'s systems finely tuned by *DQIII*, Horii had little choice but to innovate in the storytelling department. As the subtitle suggests, *Chapters Of The Chosen* was broken down into four different vignettes, which put the player in control of a different party in each before uniting them all with the true hero in the fifth and final chapter. It was a bold move that proved to be just the breath of fresh air the series needed, or any series would have needed, by its third sequel.

## SPIN-OFFS

**Dragon Quest has quite a few spin-off games, and some of them are actually quite good**






### MYSTERY DUNGEON

**This long-running series of roguelike RPGs from Chunsoft has adopted many famous videogame brands over the years, including *Chocobo* and *Pokémon*, but its first three entries were based on *Dragon Quest* and starred *DQIV*'s Torneko.**

### DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS

**Often thought of as a *Pokémon* clone, *Dragon Quest Monsters* grew out of the series' ability to recruit enemy monsters and has, since 1998, grown into a popular series in its own right. *DQM* is a handheld-only series.**





### ROCKET SLIME

***Dragon Quest*'s most basic enemy, and a favourite *DQ* mascot with fans, got his own GBA game in 2003 and two sequels on the DS and 3DS. The game largely involves using the slime as a weapon by stretching and firing him across the stage.**






"When *Dragon Quest III* came out, I felt as though I had already done everything I ever wanted to do and had to think hard to work out what I should do next," Horii recalls. "I eventually opted for the structure of different chapters because I wanted to tell individual stories of other party members as well as the main character. You travel with other members in the party in *DQIII*, and my thoughts started with the notion that every one of them would have a personal life."

Such a revolutionary story system didn't come without its hardships, however. "In the last chapter, an AI system was in place so that other party members can take part in battles. I thought it would be more interesting if the player cannot control these characters because they would have their own personality, different from the protagonist's. I must confess that the AI system needed a lot of adjustments but, thanks to it, some of the characters were more distinctively identified, such as Kiryl, who casts Thwack all the time."

**"When Dragon Quest III was released, I witnessed the big queue while hiding from the fans. The frenzy was astonishing"**



» [SNES] As hardware increased in complexity, it allowed Horii and his team to tell more emotionally engaging tales in *Dragon Quest V* and *VI*.

The technical difficulties were definitely worth it. *Dragon Quest IV*'s unique structure allows it to stand out from the crowd, and in the years since its release, following a particularly good remake on the DS that finally brought the game to Europe, *Chapters Of The Chosen* has taken its place as one of the most interesting and popular instalments in the series.

## Dragon Quest V: Hand Of The Heavenly Bride

**Format:** Super Famicom
**Also on:** PlayStation 2, DS
**Released:** 1992 (Japan), 2009 (US, Europe)
**Developed by:** Chunsoft

BY THE MID-NINETIES, a struggling Enix had closed down its US office, and so the fifth *Dragon Quest* went unreleased in the West for well over a decade, until its DS remake. It was a shame, because the first 16-bit instalment was a revelation, excelling in both gameplay and storytelling. Horii prefers to credit such advancements to good design rather than the technological advantage offered by a new console, however: "The ample memory capacity and improved graphical performance made a lot of things easier. For example, we could create more elaborate town maps, while you no longer have to reduce the size of the scenario and so forth. However, I do not necessarily take much notice of platform specs. Whatever ideas you may have, at the end of the day, you will have to develop your game to be able to comply with the given specs. That is how I make games."

Among those advancements was a greatly enhanced monster-recruitment system. Though monster recruitment was introduced in *Dragon Quest IV*, the system truly came into its own in *V*, with a vast roster of monsters that provoked a 'gotta catch 'em all' mentality in the player. But, much like *IV*, it's the innovative story that makes *Dragon Quest V* so interesting. "With *DQV*, I wanted to tell a story where three generations of characters defeat Satan," says Horii. And that's exactly what he did. Nearly 20 years before BioWare's *Dragon Age II* attempted to tell a story that spanned several decades, *Dragon Quest* got

### ITADAKI STREET/ BOOM STREET

***Itadaki Street* is a virtual board game that was created by Yuji Horii in the Famicom days. The most interesting is the PS2 edition, which featured characters from both *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*. The series is about to head to Europe with the Wii game, *Boom Street*, which features characters from both the *Mario* and *Dragon Quest* series.**






### DRAGON QUEST SWORDS

**First released as a TV game with a plastic sword controller, *Dragon Quest Kenshin* later inspired this Wii game, which saw the player explore Horii's world in first-person, slashing the Remote at any monsters they crossed paths with. Sadly, it's not very good.**

### DRAGON QUEST: MONSTER BATTLE ROAD

**A series of arcade games aimed at kids, *Monster Battle Road* is based on *DQVIII* and uses a combination of two buttons and cards to do battle against famous enemies. A Wii port, complete with custom controller, was released in 2010.**







### DRAGON QUEST WARS

**A little-known download game for DSiWare. *Dragon Quest Wars* is less an RPG and more a strategy game, similar to *Advance Wars*. It features memorable *DQ* enemies like Slimes but is pretty simple and doesn't feel as *Dragon Quest*-like as it could.**

there first with a powerful tale that allowed an unprecedented level of emotional involvement on the part of the player.

Being able to choose your wife from two – later three, in the remake – women made the player much more invested in the life of the main protagonist and had an effect on the characteristics of his children, who you later play as. The story's most affecting note, however, is the fate of that initial main character, who finds himself cursed to live out the rest of his days as a motionless statue, ever watching the struggles of his children but powerless to help them. The tale is a classical tragedy that could have easily descended into trite sentimentality but treads a relatively delicate path throughout *Hand Of The Heavenly Bride*.

This new-found maturity may have been a sign that Japan's videogame audience was growing up – and *Dragon Quest* is indeed known for its ability to appeal to generations that wouldn't normally play games – but Horii denies any suggestion that *Hand Of The Heavenly Bride* was created with older players in mind: "I did not pay much attention to the age of the demographic. I always make games with a belief that what I find interesting will be found interesting by other people."

## Dragon Quest VI: Realms Of Revelation

**Format:** Super Famicom
**Also on:** DS
**Released:** 1995 (Japan), 2011 (US, Europe)
**Developed by:** Heartbeat

AFTER THE SPIRALLING innovation of its three direct predecessors, *Dragon Quest VI* is the closest the series has come to a 'safe sequel'. It cherry picks some of the most popular elements from previous games, such as *Dragon Quest III*'s job system and dual worlds, then spruces it up with the series' most impressive graphics and largest world to date.

It didn't really feel underwhelming – this was a great RPG by any other standards – but it didn't quite feel as inventive as it could have done. We put it to Horii that he may have been overworked on *DQVI*, which was developed around the same time as *Chrono Trigger* – Horii and Toriyama's collaboration with *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi, and a work superior to any of their individual works.

"I contributed to *Chrono Trigger* by providing ideas for the story, as well as writing the first part of the scenario," he says. "I also supervised the development sometimes, but the project was basically in the hands of the Square staff. So I did not find as much difficulty as I would have expected in making sure that my schedule was manageable. With that said, it was extremely stressful that I had to keep two projects going simultaneously."

Perhaps that's why Horii took five years to complete the next *Dragon Quest*.



## DEVELOPER PROFILES

More developers than you might think have been involved in the making of Dragon Quest. Here's the lot of them…

### ARMOR PROJECT
**Technically the main developer of every Dragon Quest, Armor Project is a holding name for the partnership of Yuji Horii, Koichi Sugiyama and Akira Toriyama.**

### ENIX
**The publisher of the first seven Dragon Quest games, Enix was a major player in the 8-, 16- and 32-bit eras, until it merged with Square in 2003 to become Square Enix.**

### CHUNSOFT
**Founded by Koichi Nakamura of Enix, Chunsoft started in 1984 and developed the first five Dragon Quest titles, as well as the Mystery Dungeon series. It is still operating and is now known for adventure game 428.**

### HEARTBEAT
**A relatively obscure developer responsible for Dragon Quest VI and VII, as well as a couple of remakes. Heartbeat ceased game development in 2002, but some of its staff went on to form Genius Sonority, which has worked on some DQ spin-offs.**

### ARTEPIAZZA
**Originally recruited to create the story scenes for the Super Famicom remake of Dragon Quest III, ArtePiazza eventually became the go-to developer for Dragon Quest remakes as a whole and has handled almost all of them since 2001.**

### LEVEL-5
**A huge Japanese powerhouse, thanks largely to the success of its own Professor Layton series, Level-5 so impressed Square Enix with its Dark Cloud and Dark Chronicle PS2 games that it was then trusted to develop both Dragon Quest VIII and IX.**

### SQUARE ENIX
**The publisher and producer of every Dragon Quest since VIII, following the 2003 merger with Enix. Square Enix is also developing the upcoming Dragon Quest X, the first time a DQ title has been made in-house.**

### NINTENDO
**Though it has never made a Dragon Quest game, Nintendo's support for the series has been very important to its success, particularly in the West. Nintendo of America helped the first game get off the ground by giving it away to Nintendo Power subscribers, while Nintendo UK recently helped the launch of Dragon Quest IX by publishing the DS game and recruiting Jedward, of all people, to advertise it.**



## Dragon Quest VII: Warriors Of Eden

**Format:** PlayStation
**Also on:** N/A
**Released:** 2000 (Japan), 2001 (US)
**Developed by:** Heartbeat

IN THE FIRST five years of *Dragon Quest* development, Yuji Horii and friends were able to create four individual and brilliant entries in the series, but between 1995 and 2000 the team made only one. Was this just a natural by-product of developing for ever more complicated hardware as *Dragon Quest VII* made the jump from the Super Famicom to the PlayStation, or was there more to it than that?

"For the first time in the franchise, *Dragon Quest VII* used CD-ROM as the medium," Horii explains. "So I automatically assumed that I would never be hindered by memory capacity shortage again and that I would be able to do anything I wanted! However, I was bound by storage limitations after all, this time due to the restricted amount of available memory on the console itself. Meanwhile, the scenario ended up being as big as 10,000 pages and gave us a lot of hard work before we finally managed to squeeze it into a single game."

Horii's ambitious design caused *Dragon Quest VII* to be delayed numerous times and, when it eventually arrived, the PlayStation was in its final years and had been graced by three equally brilliant *Final Fantasy* games, allowing Squaresoft's primary RPG franchise to capture the world's attention while *Dragon Quest* slept.

Those hardcore fans who stayed faithful, even as the PlayStation 2 was released, were more than rewarded for their loyalty, however. The epic design of *Dragon Quest VII* produced a game that took well over 100 hours to complete, so it was well worth the wait. Meanwhile, the design of the world, which saw continents periodically rise from beneath the sea, gradually expanding the scope of the world and broadening the player's horizons, returned a little bit of the magic, imagination and invention that felt missing from *DQVI*.

And rightly so. If Horii was unaware of maturing audience expectations around the release of *Dragon Quest V*, he certainly felt it in the post-*Final Fantasy VII* age. "We always feel considerable pressure each time we make a new *Dragon Quest*; not only *DQVII*," he says. "Our fans expect a new game to be twice as interesting as the previous one. If it fails to meet the expectation, they will moan, '*DQ* is not interesting any more!' *DQVII* featured a big story, which comprised many sub-stories of different tastes. I was happy to see that each of those components and characters attracted different groups of fans."

> **"If Dragon Quest VII flew under the radar, Dragon Quest VIII, by comparison, shouted loud and proud from the rooftops"**

## Dragon Quest VIII: Journey Of The Cursed King

**Format:** PlayStation 2
**Also on:** N/A
**Released:** 2004 (Japan), 2005 (US), 2006 (Europe)
**Developed by:** Level-5

AS THE PLAYSTATION 2 took hold of the global videogames market, Horii and company wasted no time in bringing *Dragon Quest* to Sony's console, as has been tradition since the NES days – to always put *DQ* where it will attract the highest possible user base at that moment in time.

*Dragon Quest VIII* represented a number of firsts. Most notably, it was the first to be made following the historic merger of Enix and Square, a move that Horii was largely unaffected by due to being an independent contractor rather than an Enix employee. "I was really surprised when the merger was announced," he tells **Retro Gamer**. "Although *Dragon Quest VIII* had already been in development, the new company, Square Enix, continued to give full support to our traditional way of making *DQ* titles. So, as I looked from a *DQ* creator's standpoint, I did not notice any particular changes in the direction we took after the merger."

*Dragon Quest VIII*'s other firsts include being the first developed by Level-5, of *Professor Layton* fame; the first to be released in Europe; and, in the West at least, the first to feature full recorded voice acting. If *Dragon Quest VII* flew under the radar then *Dragon Quest VIII*, by comparison,





» [PSone] *Dragon Quest*'s profile suffered in the PSone era, thanks to a couple of delays and cancellations, as well as the popularity of *Final Fantasy*.



» [PS2] *Dragon Quest VIII* was the first to be released in Europe, and loads more have followed since, including the DS remakes of *IV*, *V* and *VI*.





shouted loud and proud from the rooftops. It was impossible to overlook, thanks mainly to some of the most attractive visuals on the PS2 – cartoon-quality graphics that felt perfectly suited to the series' roots while also emphasising the size, scale and sheer beauty of *DQ*'s biggest game world yet.

It's the addition of voice acting – not present in the original Japanese release – that Horii is most keen to talk about. "We had been receiving requests from Western publishers who wanted to have voiceover included in their versions," he reveals. "This finally materialised simply due to our new development process. I have always had a habit of making repeated changes on spoken lines for the characters until the last minute of development. However, the script for *Dragon Quest VIII* was already locked for the overseas versions, and this made it possible for us to implement voices.

## "It turned out to be as hard as I would have thought to tell such a voluminous story within the capacity of a handheld machine"




» [DS] *Dragon Quest IX* represented a huge evolution for the traditional series, a trend that looks set to continue with the online-only *DQX*.



"As far as *Dragon Quest* is concerned, I do not think voiceover is really a must. However, I understand that Western consumers welcome voices in their games. It would appear to me that the voice, rather than written words, plays a greater role in conveying subtle nuances in European languages, whereas, in Japanese, most of such nuances can be communicated by displaying words on the screen."

Horii is correct. The use of voice is especially important to *Dragon Quest VIII*, the plot for which centres around the quest to help a king who has been cursed to the point where he is transformed into a goblin-like creature and his daughter turned into a horse. The plot plays out like a cartoon comedy, and the brilliantly judged voice performances only add to that feeling. As the first true *Dragon Quest* to be released in Europe – *Dragon Warrior Monsters* appeared a few years earlier during the height of the *Pokémon* craze – these friendly, comedy stylings were the perfect way to ease unfamiliar players into Horii's world.

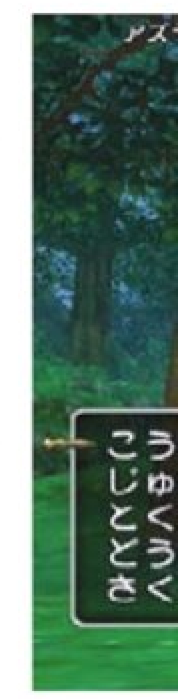
## Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels Of The Starry Skies

**Format:** DS
**Also on:** N/A
**Released:** 2009 (Japan), 2010 (US, Europe)
**Developed by:** Level-5

DESPITE ITS OWN quiet innovations, there are a number of things the *Dragon Quest* series has always done, and both its fans and detractors would readily acknowledge that its staunch traditionalism has been key to the series' success. So when *Dragon Quest IX* was first revealed to the public, it would come with three big shocks: this was to be the first *Dragon Quest* designed for a handheld games console, the first built around four-player co-op – inspired by the Japanese success of *Monster Hunter*, we imagine – and the first to dispense with menus in favour of a real-time battle system. By the time it was released in 2009, however, only two of these innovations remained, as the game reverted to a turn-based menu system following severe fan reaction.

"What we showed at the initial rollout for *Dragon Quest IX* was only a prototype," says Horii by way of explanation. "It was meant to demonstrate how enjoyable *DQ* multiplay could be, and we had not fixed our ideas at the stage. Throughout the development period, we were seeking the most player-friendly battle system, until we settled with the one we have now."

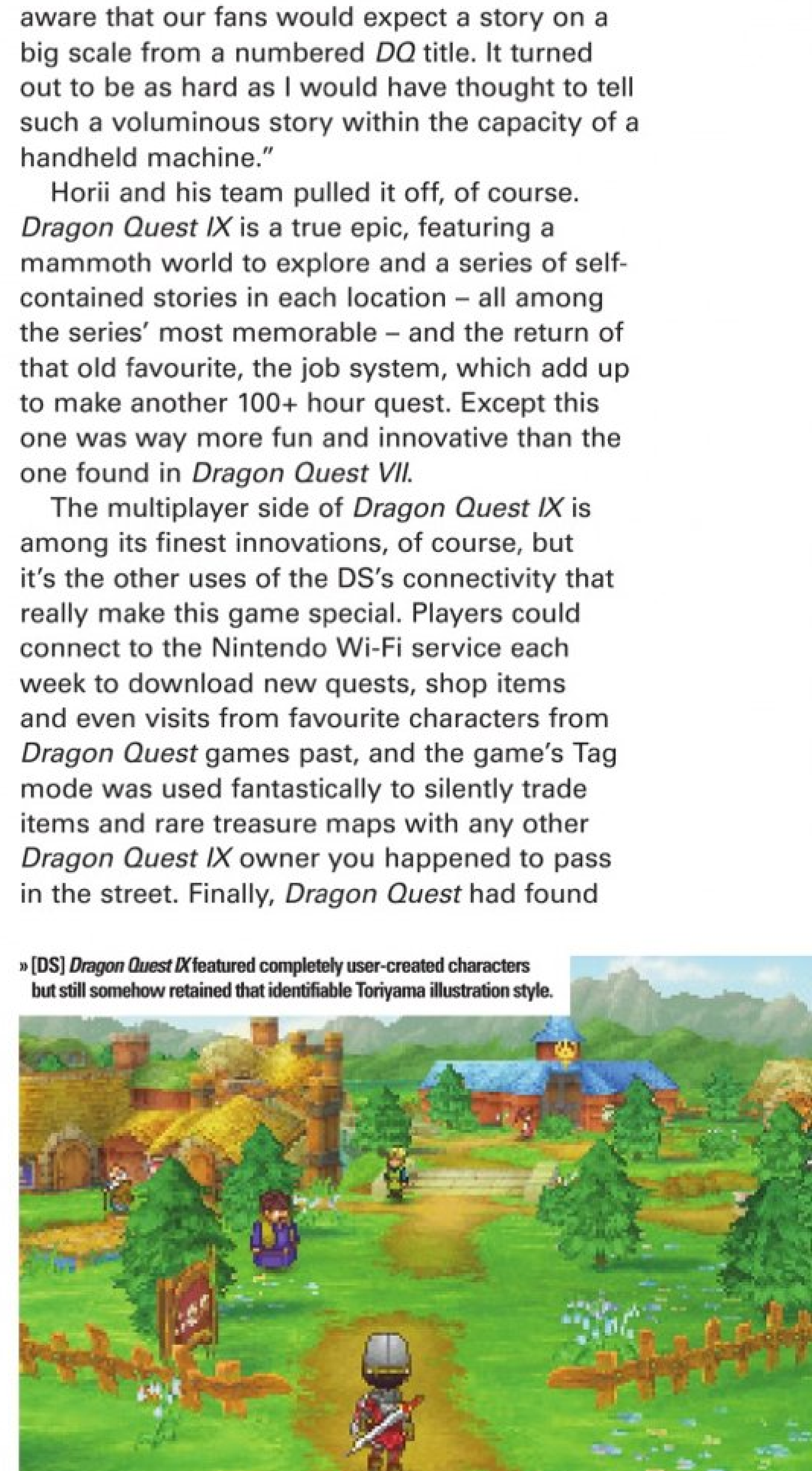
Like *Dragon Quest VII* before it, *IX* suffered numerous delays, not least because of the difficulties involved in creating such a different type of RPG… and on a handheld to boot. "*DQIX* was originally not meant to be for handheld consoles," Horii tells us. "But I thought that the Nintendo DS had paved a new path to many gameplay possibilities with its use of wireless communications, and our plan originated from a desire to make use of those functions to create some interesting features for a *Dragon Quest* side project. While developing the idea further, we eventually came to a point where we felt determined to make it really special to be worth our effort. And it was followed by our decision to develop it as a numbered *DQ* title. On the other hand, we were aware that our fans would expect a story on a big scale from a numbered *DQ* title. It turned out to be as hard as I would have thought to tell such a voluminous story within the capacity of a handheld machine."



Horii and his team pulled it off, of course. *Dragon Quest IX* is a true epic, featuring a mammoth world to explore and a series of self-contained stories in each location – all among the series' most memorable – and the return of that old favourite, the job system, which add up to make another 100+ hour quest. Except this one was way more fun and innovative than the one found in *Dragon Quest VII*.

The multiplayer side of *Dragon Quest IX* is among its finest innovations, of course, but it's the other uses of the DS's connectivity that really make this game special. Players could connect to the Nintendo Wi-Fi service each week to download new quests, shop items and even visits from favourite characters from *Dragon Quest* games past, and the game's Tag mode was used fantastically to silently trade items and rare treasure maps with any other *Dragon Quest IX* owner you happened to pass in the street. Finally, *Dragon Quest* had found

» [DS] *Dragon Quest IX* featured completely user-created characters but still somehow retained that identifiable Toriyama illustration style.







a way to make use of all those Japanese fans crowding around game stores on the day of an exciting new launch, and Horii himself has even been known to anonymously walk through those crowds, discreetly trading his own unique treasure map with unsuspecting fans.

Has the RPG, one of the most famously solitary of game genres, finally gone social? "I would say that *Dragon Quest* always had elements of social gaming," Horii answers to our surprise. "*Dragon Quest* fans would never keep their gaming experiences to themselves. Instead, they would ask other *DQ* players in their circle of friends to find out how much progress they have made and share information among them like, 'Where on earth can I find the key?' The Tag mode brought about a situation where *DQ* players go out to town with their DS and walk about in search of another player to get treasure maps from. It was almost like reality being invaded by the virtual world, which I found quite amusing."





## Dragon Quest X: Rise Of The Five Tribes

**Format:** Wii
**Also on:** Wii U
**Released:** 2012
**Developed by:** Square Enix

**IF THE AN**NOUNCEMENTS surrounding *Dragon Quest IX* were a shock then this year's reveal of *Dragon Quest X* must have been enough to send some hardcore fans to an early grave. Not only will *Rise Of The Five Tribes* appear on the Wii – a console currently at the end of its natural life, as the PlayStation was during the release of *Dragon Quest VII* – but it is also being developed for the Wii U, an unproven console, and will be a completely online RPG, much like *Phantasy Star Online*. And just to add to the risk, this is the first *Dragon Quest* to be developed internally at Square Enix, a company that hardly has the best track record when it comes to online RPGs.

When we ask Yuji Horii about his ambitions for *Dragon Quest X*, he declines to give a response, but then that's hardly surprising when much of the forthcoming game is still shrouded in secrecy, and Horii is taking a back seat, relatively speaking, serving only as executive director this time.

So instead of looking forward, let's take this opportunity to look back and ask Horii how he feels about his accomplishments, 25 years on. "As I look back on the first *Dragon Quest* now, I remember many people trying to persuade me to give it up," he reveals. "They would say that it was reckless to make an RPG for the NES. However, the fact is that, the more people tried to discourage me, the more encouraged I got to give it a shot. And, at the end… Well, I think I managed to prove them wrong."

Mini Making Of

## DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS: JOKER 2









The next numbered *Dragon Quest* sequel is many months away at the moment, but the recently released *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2* may be enough to keep any avid fans satisfied in the meantime. Yuji Horii has always been actively involved in the production of the *Dragon Quest* spin-offs as well as the main games, so we took the opportunity to grill him about the sequel.

**Retro Gamer: Now that *Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2* is out in Europe, what aspects would you say you're most proud of?**
**Yuji Horii:** I am proud of the fact that even an insignificant monster can be upgraded into the most powerful one. In addition, I must mention the Tag mode, which, as in *DQIX*, allows you to enjoy communication play casually. You can be engaged in a virtual versus battle with another player you have never met before. You can go out and use the mode to 'meet' a stranger. Then you may be able to win a battle against him or her to scout one of the monsters they have looked after. Trust me – you cannot help punching the air when you have done it!

**RG: What specific ideas did you contribute to *Joker 2*, and what was the most challenging part?**
**YH:** I was involved as the general director and offered my ideas, particularly about what feeling the player should experience while playing and also how intuitive the game generally is, because I pay much attention to these areas with any *Dragon Quest* title. The 'upgrading your monster into the most powerful one' idea came from me, and I made many other suggestions, including various features of the Tag mode. During the period of finishing touches, I did some of the final adjustments on monster parameters, such as their strengths and the value of experience you collect when you beat them. At the end, I got involved more comprehensively than I had imagined. To tell you the truth, I had to concentrate on the project for the three months up to creation of the master version.

# THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD

**The Sacred Armour of Antiriad, known as Rad Warrior in the USA, is a British classic which in recent years has been reclassified as a Metroidvania. John Szczepaniak speaks to designer and artist Dan Malone, along with producer Richard Leinfellner, to reveal why it's so much more than this label suggests**




## IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
- » **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3

**Metroidvania is a portmanteau derived from *Metroid* and *Castlevania*; it classifies side-scrolling games which feature staggered open-world progression dependant on item acquisition. The problem is that now it's being retroactively applied to games which predate *Metroid* or were developed without its influence. Although an easy way to encourage interest in certain classics, using the term can also detract from a game's deserved acclaim. This year marks the 25th anniversary of *Antiriad* – magazines from the time report its launch as October 1986. Ironically, this same year saw an August release for *Metroid* in Japan, and then a month later *Akumajou Dracula* (aka *Castlevania*) arrived in stores. With *Crash* magazine showcasing *Antiriad*'s development as early as its April issue that year, some have commented on the exploratory similarities between *Metroid* and *Antiriad* as being parallel thinking. We decided to investigate. As *Antiriad*'s designer and artist Dan Malone explains: "I have heard it compared to *Metroid* before, but at the time I had no knowledge of the game. And I too have heard it described as a case of parallel thinking – which I guess it was, these things do happen."**

Producer Richard Leinfellner has a logical explanation for any perceived similarities: "Yeah, you can make those comparisons now, but in the UK *Metroid* came out after we did! We simply didn't have the game as reference – it didn't exist at the time. I think it comes down to common roots. If you think about it, a lot of games have their roots in comics or in sci-fi. If your two designers have similar upbringings and similar influences, they're going to come up with a similar design. Dan had a really rich history in comic books, so that would be shaping his history."

Indeed, Dan confirms the comic book influence: "The main theme for *Antiriad* came about through a desire to merge ancient themes with high technology, and was more inspired by comic books than any game I played before. I'd never really played them before, apart from *Space Invaders* and *Tetris*."

Dan joined Palace Software after leaving Ipswich college, which allowed him to build a portfolio of artwork that came in handy when answering Palace's advert, which asked for a '*2000 AD*-style artist'. Having little experience with computers, the first thing Dan was told was to play games: "I played games since I needed to see what was possible graphically – which was an eye-opener – and get an idea of the benchmark. I remember being interested in how the graphics

## THE ANTIRIAD TEAM

THE TEAM AT Palace Software on Stan Schembri's birthday, most likely around 1986. From left: Dan Malone, designer and artist on *Antiriad*; Steve Brown; Stan Schembri, coder for the C64 version of *Antiriad*; Mark Eason; Richard Joseph, the musician for *Antiriad* and slightly obscured by Mark; Chris Stangroom, programmer for the ZX Spectrum version; slightly obscured is Andrew Fitter, programmer for the Amstrad CPC version; finally Peter Stone, head of Palace Software, sporting the best moustache we've ever seen. Richard Leinfellner explains: "That was my first real job, and I don't think I've ever worked with a more fun bunch of people. It was just brilliant, because we were making it up as we went along. I think we did most of those games on like, less than 100,000 quid. But when I was working at EA, my budgets were, like, 35 million. Kind of different!"



differed between the three main machines at the time (Spectrum, Amstrad and C64). Looking at *Cauldron* on the Spectrum, I first thought it was some kind of test version for the C64!"

Richard explains how *Antiriad* then came about: "We started that just as we were working on *Cauldron 2*,

Inspired by comics, *Antiriad* also came bundled with a comic detailing the backstory of how Earth endured a nuclear holocaust and then alien invasion. The only hope is Tal, who is raised in secret and trained to become humanity's saviour. As revealed in an old *Crash* interview, the storyline and comic came after

> " Yeah, you can make those comparisons now, but in the UK Metroid came out after we did "

and decided we needed more than one game. *Cauldron* has its own graphical style and we tried to find a second style – one which was harder-hitting. Dan was one of the artists on *Cauldron* [Amstrad] and he had an idea for a game based out of... well he used to do comic books. That was his brainchild, wanting to do stuff with a guy who looked like Tal. It was very much visually driven, and he had strong ideas about how he wanted it to look."

the game world itself had formed. We asked Dan to elaborate, which revealed something interesting: "The concept was my own, and the 16-page comic. I did the level layout and most of the gameplay. It was developed for the Spectrum and C64 concurrently. The Amstrad was the final version in the initial development process. Because a previous Palace release, *Cauldron*, had been deemed too hard to complete, we were asked to tone down the difficulty for *Antiriad*. In my mind, and others, it made the game too easy in the end!"

As told by Richard, this led to some amusing moments: "Yeah, we did! And to be honest, I think we toned it down too much! Towards the end we had a competition in the office to see how fast we could complete the game, and I think my record was 1 minute and 35 seconds. Obviously we could do this because we knew where everything was. But still, it was a relatively short time. I think after *Cauldron*, which was hard because we never played the whole game through without cheats, that was one of the lessons we learned. For *Antiriad* we always played without cheats. But we had this decision – do we make it more difficult or keep it as is? We tried it out with some players who didn't know where all the objects were and they spent a large amount of time on the puzzles, so in the end we left it."

Of course, one of the most memorable aspects is that until you find the armour you can't see how much health you have. Dan explains his intentions: "Tal is your typical noble barbarian from

» [Amstrad] There's an eerie atmosphere when you discover and enter the ruins for the first time.



» [ZX Spectrum] The gravity displacement boots, when taken back to the suit, allow you to fly freely around the levels.




» [ZX Spectrum] Unlike on the Amstrad or C64, the Spectrum version allowed you to fire two shots at a time.





» [C64] At one point in the caves your path is blocked by this force field – you need to leave your suit to get the item beyond.




» [Amstrad] The CPC offering is our favourite version, but all the 8-bit outings are great.

a tribe of hunter gatherers, living in a 'prehistoric' world without sophisticated tech. I wanted the difference to be noted, so that when the suit is reached and activated, the sharp contrast of stone age tools to exotic high tech is dramatically highlighted, and there is a real difference to how the game feels."

The press in 1986 took great delight in *Antiriad,* and there was a lot of coverage, which we shared with Dan, since, as he puts it: "I'm going to have to really dredge the memory here – it's been a long time and I'm a bit rusty concerning those early days!" One fascinating anecdote in *Crash* 35 quoted Dan as saying: "We all sat round the office, bashing ideas around, so there's a little bit of everyone in there. The game's playability came about by trial and error. You design a route through the game and then stick in lots of red herrings. But obviously it's impossible to gauge whether you've succeeded, so it was a profound relief when the press started to look at the preview versions and liked what they saw. I remember we took round a preview version on the C64 to Tim Metcalfe at *C&VG*. He looked at it, decided he'd seen enough and wrote the first review. We also had a program where I could alter backgrounds and then test them. If I thought a screen was too easy I could move a sprite a little, and then try it out again. I could move the position of meanies and the way they moved."

> "Memory was tight and so many things were cut. Empty voids on the map would have been secret rooms"

We asked Dan to elaborate on his younger self: "The design route was based on the path to the top of the volcano via the forest and ruined city. That pyramid shape was fixed at a relatively early stage with the details tweaked over time. And yes, we had a nice tile editor which allowed me to make changes at will and try them out immediately."

Another quote from young Dan which we shared with older Dan was on enemies: "Most are just mutants left over from the war which ended civilisation. There was another race on the planet which collaborated with the aliens when they invaded. So the aliens enslaved them and turned them to cyborgs. You'll meet them in the city, blazing away with machine guns. Mutated dragons in the volcano section have been paralysed, but their jaws still work, and as they move their jaws sparks are generated which light the gas seeping up through the vents, sending a sheet of flame across the cavern."

Today Dan recalls the technical difficulties of implementing the above: "The main themes behind the enemies were: irradiated local fauna, alien enslaved local fauna and the actual alien invaders. But the enemies were cut down dramatically due to memory restrictions. In the end most of them were pretty basic, independently floating with 2-4 frames each, which could be placed anywhere within the world map. We used a lot of frames for specialised areas, like the gunner and the dragon flames which were heavy on available memory – but I felt this was vital to create memorable areas

## IN MEMORY OF

SADLY, OF THOSE involved with *Antiriad,* three have since passed away: musician Richard Joseph (pictured left), coder Stan Schembri (right), and coder Chris Stangroom (see boxout on the previos page). Leinfellner explains the shocking events, "Chris was murdered, actually. It was awful. He'd left Palace and was in Hungary with his girlfriend. She left but he stayed a few more days, and he got stabbed. If you knew Chris, he was the gentlest person. You couldn't imagine a more gentle person. So I have no idea how he managed to get killed, but it was awful. Out of all the people you know, he was the least likely." He also recounts Stan's passing, "The last time I saw Dan Malone was two or so years ago, at Stan's wake. We went up to the old local pub in London, and the whole group pretty much met up – all the old Palace people. It was a really fun evening. I have an old photograph of the original Palace team, where I'm taking the picture, and all the people furthest away are dead now. So I'm kind of wondering if it's one of those spooky pictures where death is working its way up the frame."






» The 16-page comic for *Antiriad*, conceived and created by Dan, details the game's backstory and gives proceedings gravitas.

within the game and so we had to take frames from elsewhere."

We asked about changes, and if the player had been able to alter the throwing angle at any point. "It would have been better to aim the rocks but I don't recall any versions with this happening. We were under a tight deadline and it was another one of those things that never got implemented." We mention a few empty areas on the map and ask if anything else was removed, to which Dan replies: "Yes, I originally wanted the armour to be scattered all over the forest. But it works better as it is, with elements enhancing the already visually complete armour. Memory was tight and so many things were dropped or cut down dramatically. The empty voids would have been secret rooms with some pickup located within."

While *Antiriad* had a melancholy but rousing opening by Richard Joseph, the game itself only had sound effects. Dan explains: "That would be another technical limitation as I remember. Plus, if we'd had more time, I'm sure Richard Joseph would have come up with something more than suitable!" Interestingly, in a Remix64 interview from 2001, Richard Joseph mentioned creating an 'abstract and surreal' alternative track that never made it, but which he still listened to.

Ultimately, *Antiriad* did well enough that it was ported to other home computers, and even released in America under the name *Rad Warrior*. Richard Leinfellner commented on the name: "We did a deal with Epyx and they released it. I know we were shopping it around. They wanted something to suggest it was a fighting game, and I think *Antiriad* was a bit too – shall we say – clever for them. Dan's idea was that it became a word where people had almost forgotten the meaning. It was this sacred suit which could be used to get into radioactive areas, and they called it *Antiriad*, but actually it was anti-radiation. It just went above the heads of Epyx. They went, 'Oh, yeah, we kind of get it, but can we have something a bit harder hitting?'"

With so much success, we asked Dan if there'd been plans for a follow up: "No, we never considered a sequel at the time. I was straight onto my next project, *Superthief* (C64 and Atari ST), which we managed to finish but unfortunately never released."

**Many thanks to the interviewees caught at a busy time, and Martyn Carroll for sharing his contacts list.**




» [Amstrad] Astute players know left of here is an inaccessible area. Sadly, using the Amstrad's wall glitch revealed there's no hidden room.




## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**CAULDRON**
**SYSTEMS:** AMSTRAD, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
**YEAR:** 1985

**CAULDRON II: THE PUMPKIN STRIKES BACK**
**SYSTEMS:** AMSTRAD, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
**YEAR:** 1986

**BARBARIAN (PICTURED)**
**SYSTEMS:** ACORN, AMIGA, AMSTRAD, APPLE II, ATARI ST, BBC MICRO, C64, DOS, ZX SPECTRUM
**YEAR:** 1987

# STRYKERS RUN

**S*tryker's Run* was one of the games that proved that the BBC Micro B was not just for posh families to help their children with their homework.** This was because *Stryker's Run* involved you shooting everything in sight, throwing grenades and flying helicopters. Commander Stryker didn't want to assist you with algebra; he wanted to turn enemies to skeletons, and do you know what? He was all the better for it.



# MEMORABLE MOMENTS

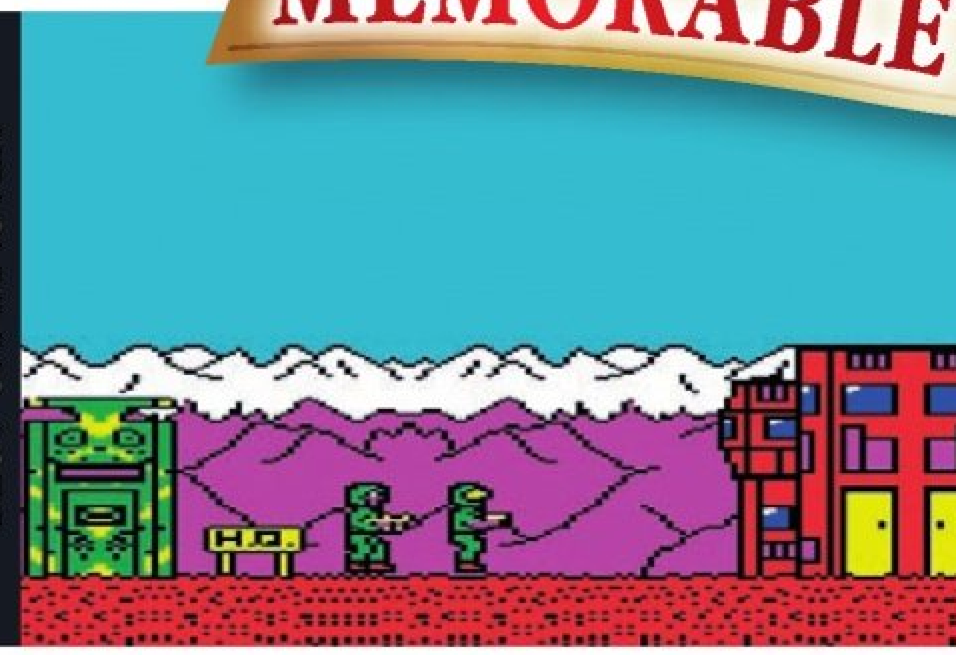
BEST LEVEL



## In it for the long run

*Stryker's Run* is one continuous level, scrolling from left to right as you progress. If you're not being shot at or accosted by helicopters then you can enjoy the scenery in its BBC colour scheme glory. Although it is clearly set in a post-apocalyptic world, there are familiar sights to enjoy such as graveyards, bombed buildings, military bases and even a ruined cinema. Some nice scrolling effects in the background add to the overall atmospheric feel. In truth, Commander Stryker cares not for his surroundings; he has one thing on his mind and that is killing as many enemies as possible.

BEST CHARACTER



## A lone hero

The best character is Commander Stryker himself. Dressed in a natty green jumpsuit and with a cool space helmet, he runs and jumps through levels with real panache. Sometimes his jump is a bit wonky and he'll land on a mine that he clearly should have stepped over, but generally he is a good sort and you'll enjoy spending time in his company. His only aim is to keep moving right, all the while shooting anything that moves or gets in his way. He has also got nine lives – like a cat – but these can go pretty quickly, a direct hit on a mine, for example, taking four in one go.

BEST ENEMY



## So much for camouflage

There are many great enemies in the game, from helicopter gunners to more elite-looking troopers. Our personal favourite, though, is this man in a white uniform. In a world coloured by an 8-bit computer with reds, pinks and greens being the main palette, the idea of wearing a white suit is suicide; he can't sneak up on you because he stands out a mile away. Looking like a cross between a Nazi officer and John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*, he is not particularly frightening, nor very hard to beat, but he just looks so damn stylish. Sadly, you can't steal his suit when he's gone.

BEST VEHICLE



## Bomb to a gunfight

At certain points in the game you can pilot either a natty helicopter or a pretty smart plane. The helicopter is the most exciting, especially when you realise for the first time that you can press the enter button to climb inside. This euphoria soon wears off when you notice some flaws in this weapon of mass destruction, though. Firstly, you can only drop bombs, which can be tricky in a dogfight. Secondly, it is apparently made of very thin glass. While Stryker himself can step on a mine and survive, one hit to your chopper and it explodes instantly, dropping you back to terra firma.

BEST DEATH



## A bone to pick

The best death is clearly that of your enemies when you blast them full of lasers. In *Stryker's Run* they don't just disappear in a little puff of smoke; they turn into skeletons and then crumble to dust before your eyes. It is actually a little bit *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, but it is a really fantastic effect. It puts you in no doubt that Commander Stryker is packing a pretty impressive weapon that's capable of disintegrating enemies in a single hit. It puts you in mind of the Seventies Daleks, who would fire x-ray guns at people, turning them to bones before they fell. Great stuff.

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



## He eats Green Berets for breakfast

Despite its brainy image, the BBC Micro wasn't short of great arcade conversions, boasting wonderful versions of *Defender*, *Pac-Man* and *Zaxxon*. *Stryker's Run* has a definite side-scrolling arcade game feel to it, there being something of *Green Beret* about it, but what makes it a classic is that it really feels like its own game. The graphics are atmospheric, the action fast-paced, and it always makes you want to play again after you've died. It is not an easy game by any means, and you'll have to play for hours to see the end, but if you get that far, you have truly deserved it.




## IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** BBC MICRO
- **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

## What the press said… ages ago



**www.bbcmicrogames.com**

"*Stryker's Run* raised the bar again for sideways shooters on the BBC Micro. You play the part of Commander Stryker, and basically have to shoot everything in sight as you make your way through the levels. Superb graphics for the time and great gameplay put *Stryker's Run* into the BBC classics hall of fame."

## What we think

While *Stryker's Run* is not the most famous game on the BBC, it is really worth the effort of loading it up. As you run past the pink mountains, leaping over mines and removing the skin from your enemies, you will realise that Superior Software created a game that deserves to be far better remembered than it is.




# FROM THE ARCHIVES

**RETRO GAMER** DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

# CRL Group

## Meet Clem Chambers: bestselling novelist, freelance business writer, financial wizard and internet gaming pioneer. Graeme Mason looks back 30 years to when he was just starting out with his first venture, Computer Rentals Limited…

**The genesis of the CRL Group began a little differently to most software houses. As its full name suggests, Clem Chambers' original plan back in 1982 had been to start a company that specialised in renting out computer equipment. The rebranding to CRL and the move into software only occurred when he was forced into his back-up plan by the lack of success in this area. "We just couldn't get the rental business off the ground," confirms Clem himself, "so we decided to make the jump into publishing."**

This ambitious teenager from Kent was already involved in the fast-growing computer industry, having penned articles for *Popular Computing Weekly* and *Your Computer*, not that journalism had been a potential career path. "My spelling and grammar have always been somewhat eccentric," winces Clem, "so writing for me in those pre-word-processor days was painful and laborious. Doing it for a living would've been torment!" Instead he concentrated on realising his main ambition of becoming an entrepreneur, "or businessman, as it was called back in those days," adds Clem with a smile. The final element for CRL was the tagline: "Hollywood were the Dream Sellers, so I thought we should be the Dream Makers."

### Hitting the Jackpot

CRL's first base was above a clothes shop on Whitechapel Road, London. "It was the cheapest office I could find and certainly an interesting location; the building was on a slight tilt after a bomb had blown the rear off it during World War II," says Clem. Life was tough during CRL's formative years; after the software drought of Christmas 1982, the market was flooded with games and every publisher had a massive task simply to remain afloat. "The big issue was how to make games and stay in business," continues Clem, "and casualties were immense as you tried your best to make a hit with plenty of misses along the way." And given his business-like attitude, Clem's opinion of the end product was perhaps to be expected: "Games were like pop singles to me: each one had approximately six weeks of life, so I concluded the best way to stay alive was to release one after the other. Fire and forget."

CRL's first official game was a fruit machine simulator called *Jackpot*. "It sold a ton," says Clem proudly, "and at £4.95 a copy made us almost 30 grand." However, its success demonstrated to the young software publisher just how mercurial the games industry could be: "*Jackpot* showed me how you could never guess what would be a hit. It was written in BASIC and couldn't have been any simpler, yet it was a huge seller. We produced many games that were miles better but sold a fraction of the copies."

Following Clem's policy, CRL released game after game throughout 1983 and 1984 on a variety of formats, most of them forgettable entries in the history of 8-bit gaming. A key addition to the staff also occurred in 1984, with Ian Ellery



### INSTANT EXPERT

**CRL began life** in computer rentals before Clem Chambers realised that there was little future in that particular line of business.

**Pete Cooke produced** four games for CRL: *Juggernaut*, *Tau Ceti*, *Academy* and *Room Ten*.

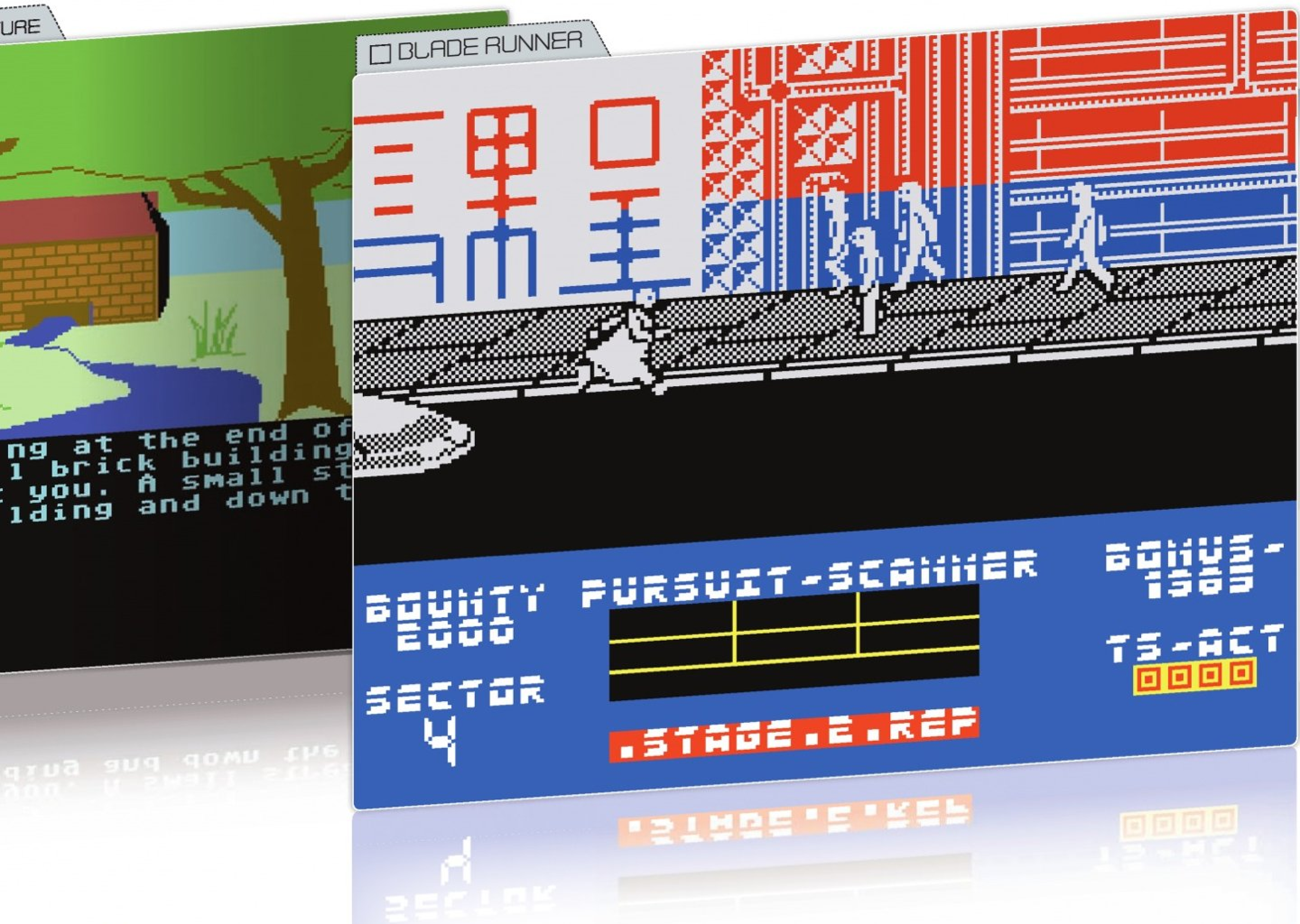
**The *Tau Ceti*** triangular cardboard box was a disaster for CRL, as most of them were crushed either in transit or during storage.

**CRL's policy of** soliciting third-party games led it to forge relationships with developers such as Delta 4 and St Bride's.

**Programmer Andy Stoddart** acquired the nickname 'Android' because of his ability to work long shifts without eating or resting. His name is Paul, becoming known by his middle name to avoid confusion with another Paul at CRL.

**CRL's *War Of The Worlds*** was based on the music of Jeff Wayne rather than the book by HG Wells.

**One of CRL's** early bestsellers was *Olympics*. Part of an Olympic development now occupies the site where CRL's King's Yard offices used to be.




## “Games were like pop singles: each one had approximately six weeks of life”

CLEM ON THE EARLY EIGHTIES SOFTWARE MARKET



joining as development manager. “He’d heard I’d signed *The Rocky Horror Show*,” recalls Clem, “and he had a few interesting ideas for the game. Ian hadn’t been involved in the trade before, but in those days it was still possible to hire someone with no experience and just a motorbike to their name!”

Ian soon found his artistic qualities being put to good use, with his drawings and cartoons appearing on numerous cassette inlays. Also on board at this point were coders Jay Derrett, Andy Stoddart and Richard Taylor, who would all become influential as CRL rose to prominence.

1985 proved to be an important year for CRL, as it saw the first of its big licences, as well as its initial release from legendary programmer Pete Cooke. This relationship began with a cassette that arrived on Clem’s desk, accompanied by a terse letter. “You could often tell a good submission by the note with the tape,” notes Clem. “A long letter usually meant a poor attempt at a game. Programmers who knew they had a good game tended not to ramble on, and this was the case with Pete Cooke.”

The game was a truck-driving simulator called *Juggernaut*, and despite not being the greatest-selling title – Clem estimates that it shifted around 1,500 copies – it was a favourite with Clem and marked the beginning of a purple patch for the publisher: “I always liked those games that were a little different from the norm – in fact, a penchant for the unusual was probably a commercial weakness in me.” And *Juggernaut* itself? “It was vectorscan, which was cool in the same way as the arcade games *Asteroids* and *Star Wars* had been. It was also fun in a challenging way and had realistic physics, which was unusual back then.” CRL was busy releasing a raft of original titles across a range of platforms, although it was about to take a swim in more perilous waters.

### Licensing travails

CRL had already dipped its toes in the precarious licensing industry with *The Magic Roundabout* and a game based on the latest Gerry Anderson puppet show, *Terrahawks*. “We did a lot of attempted licensing and consciously sought out potential properties,” remembers Clem, “but it was a tricky time to be involved in it.” This was proved true by what occurred after the release of *Terrahawks*. Having done a deal with Gerry Anderson, Clem was naturally overjoyed to be in with a chance of developing a *Thunderbirds* game, without doubt Anderson’s most famous IP. “But we got beaten to it by BT’s Firebird,” says Clem ruefully. “I guess they offered Gerry a lot more than we had, and that was that. I reluctantly accepted the situation, but in reality I was totally gutted.”

Also in 1985, CRL acquired the *Blade Runner* licence, which was surprisingly not based on the film itself but on the music by Vangelis. “The movie rights were all over the place, so we got the music rights from a company called Rocksoft, who tried to pioneer music licensing in computer games,” recalls Clem. Gameplay-wise this ▶

### BY THE NUMBERS

**3:** Horror adventures from the keyboard of Rod Pike were published by CRL

**9:** The score given to *Trigger Happy*, the sequel to *Thundercross*, by *Zzap!64*. It’s safe to say that they were not CRL’s biggest fans

**15:** The BBFC certificate given to Rod Pike’s *Dracula* adventure, despite CRL’s lobbying for an 18 certificate and the resulting controversy

**1,500:** The number of copies Clem estimates Pete Cooke’s debut game *Juggernaut* sold

**3,000:** Amount in pounds that Clem spent on the number plate CRL 1 for his new BMW in 1983

**10,000:** Amount in pounds given to Clem by his father to get started in business, before he opened CRL



» [C64] One of the first 8-bit games to feature a black hero: *Cyborg*.

## TIMELINE

**1982**
COMPUTER RENTALS LTD IS FORMED BY CLEM CHAMBERS AND MIKE HODGES

**1983**
WITH THE COMPUTER RENTAL BUSINESS ABANDONED, CRL BEGINS TO PUBLISH GAMES. THE FIRST IS FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATION *JACKPOT*




meant an accurate rendition of the *Blade Runner* music, but the graphics, plot and character names were all subtly altered while retaining the movie's dystopian spirit and setting.

Before the release of *Blade Runner*, however, came possibly CRL's most successful licensed game. Following its work on Jeff Wayne's *War Of The Worlds*, Clem had been approached by the rights holder of *The Rocky Horror Show* during the previous year: "I think they were impressed that we could work with an IP holder who was famous for being picky, and it went on from there." It was certainly an exciting time for CRL and Clem: "We got to make nice relationships with Richard O'Brien and [ZTT Records], who were heavily involved with the pop group Frankie Goes To Hollywood. It may all sound glitzy now, but I can remember lots of cash flow problems and coding death marches at the time!" Despite these travails, *The Rocky Horror Show* went on to become a big seller for CRL, with the Spectrum and Commodore 128 machines receiving much-improved versions the following year.

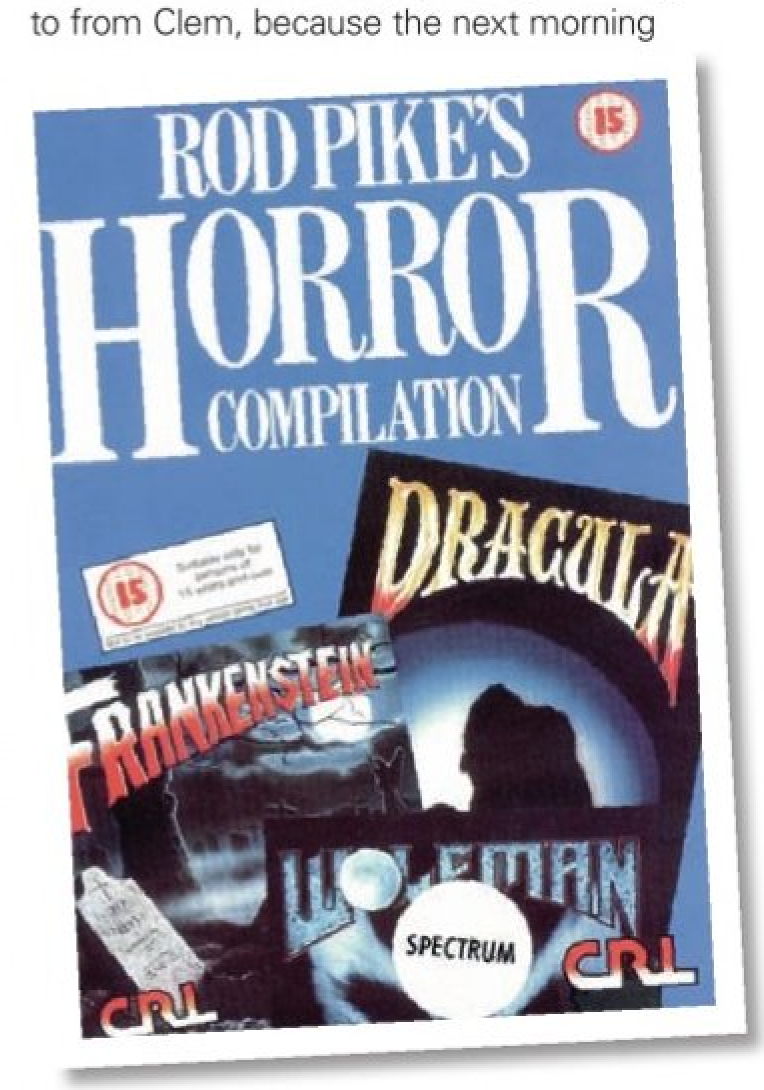
We remain in CRL's pivotal year of 1985; it had gone public – "an accounting technicality," notes Clem – and moved to a bigger location in Stratford. The new office was voluminous compared to Whitechapel Road; in what Clem reckons must have been the gatehouse of the old factory, CRL's office space ballooned by 1,500 square feet in addition to another 5,000 feet on the second floor across the yard, which served as a base for his cadre of youthful programmers.

### The Zen Room

The in-house development team had been formed when Clem realised that it was proving difficult to work with freelancers on licensed projects and to assist in communications with his own coders. The group quickly gained the moniker 'the Zen Room' in homage to *The Rocky Horror Show*, and initially included Jay Derrett, Ian Foster, Jeff Lee and Andy Stoddart.

"Clem offered me a job in April 1984 after I had written a technical demo for them," remembers Andy Stoddart, one of Clem's longest-serving development employees, who had already programmed *The Magic Roundabout* and *Blade Runner* on the Spectrum, and found himself more involved with the Commodore 64 by the time the team was formed. So what was it like working in the Zen Room? "It was a really fun place," he says. "There were no doors on some of the rooms so we could drop in and out for chats or swap technical points, and Clem himself would often hold discussion sessions in the central part, where we would all just brainstorm game ideas."

Clem agrees: "The Zen Room was essentially a giant clubhouse for talented teenagers to make games. Quite a few of them basically lived there too!" Despite this, the CRL boss was occasionally required to discipline his young employees, as Andy cautiously recalls: "There was one time the guys were playing cricket with the empty cassette cases stored at the back of the Zen Room, and they got a right talking to from Clem, because the next morning




### WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**Clem Chambers**
As well as being a writer of thriller fiction, Clem runs Europe's largest stocks and shares website, ADVFN, in between writing for publications such as *Forbes* and *The Scotsman*. He can even occasionally be spotted offering his sage financial advice as a guest on various news networks, including the BBC.







**Ian Ellery**
After Nexus, Ian began work at an illustration studio before eventually becoming a freelance illustrator. He has since designed several children's TV shows and has a series of fine art prints at **www.kindamagic.co.uk**.

**Andrew Stoddart**
One of the longest-serving CRL development employees, Stoddart went on to work in business programming until 2001. Nowadays he mixes home life with a keen interest in photography.

**Jeff Lee**
The self-proclaimed "production factotum" is currently a PhD student at Newcastle University.

**Richard Taylor**
After studying software engineering at Imperial College, Taylor followed his main interest areas of compiler technology and microprocessors before co-founding his own company, CriticalBlue, in 2002. The company specialises in software tools for multicore software development.

**Jay Derrett**
After CRL, Jay began work as a trainee programmer at a printing company before moving on via various money-broking systems. He is now IT director at a private equity house in London.

**Jon Law**
The graphics wizard left CRL to form a games production company. After a stint at Electronic Arts, he then worked for developer Deep Red on numerous city-building games before moving to his current employ at Blitz Studios (**blitzgames studios.com**).

**Pete Cooke**
According to Wikipedia, he's last known to be lecturing at Leicester University. Despite our best efforts, however, the master coder remains elusive. If you're reading this, Pete, please get in touch!

**1984** – ANDY STODDART AND IAN ELLERY JOIN THE CRL TEAM. *GLUG GLUG* IS THE PICK OF THE GAMES RELEASED THIS YEAR, ALTHOUGH THE WELL-TIMED *OLYMPICS* IS ALSO A BIG SELLER

**1985** – IT'S A MAKE-OR-BREAK YEAR AS SEVERAL BIG NAMES ARE RELEASED, INCLUDING THE LICENCES *BLADE RUNNER* AND *THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW* AS WELL AS PETE COOKE'S *TAU CETI*. ALSO IN 1985, CRL MOVES PREMISES TO NEW, CAPACIOUS OFFICES AT STRATFORD, JON LAW ARRIVES TO HELP WITH GRAPHIC DESIGN, AND THE ZEN ROOM IS FORMED

**1986** – CRL LAUNCHES BUDGET LINE ALPHA OMEGA AND THE GROUNDBREAKING NU WAVE LABEL. THE FIRST OF THE ROD PIKE HORROR TRILOGY, *DRACULA*, IS RELEASED, AS WELL AS THE SLIGHTLY LESS CONTROVERSIAL *THE VERY BIG CAVE ADVENTURE*

**1987** – CRL FORGES AN ALLIANCE WITH ELECTRONIC ARTS TO DISTRIBUTE ITS GAMES. IAN ELLERY AND PETE COOKE DEPART FOR NEXUS WHILE *TAU CETI* SEQUEL, *ACADEMY*, IS CRL'S FINEST GAME OF THE YEAR, DESPITE THE 18-CERTIFICATE *JACK THE RIPPER* TAKING ALL THE HEADLINES. BUDGET LINE ALPHA OMEGA IS REBRANDED INTO THE POWER HOUSE

**1988** – BUDGET LABEL THE POWER HOUSE IS SOLD IN FEBRUARY AND THE CRACKS IN THE EA AGREEMENT START TO SHOW, CULMINATING IN SOME UNFORTUNATE REDUNDANCIES DURING THE SUMMER

**1989** – CRL RELEASES ITS FIRST 16-BIT GAMES AND CLEM FORMS HIS EXIT STRATEGY, ON-LINE PLC, BEFORE EVENTUALLY CLOSING DOWN CRL IN 1990

there was about £300 worth of cassette boxes lying around in little pieces!"

CRL was always considering future business relationships, and Clem had for some time fostered an unusual idea. "I was a firm believer in soliciting third-party games," he explains, "and this was a rarity, as most other software houses didn't bother." When the Delta 4 parody *Bored Of The Rings* came to Clem's attention, it had already secured some impressive reviews and CRL consequently signed the game.

Around the same time, Silversoft, one of the oldest software houses, having been formed in 1981, was struggling in the ultra-competitive environment. "They were a big name of old and we bought a significant percentage of it in 1985," says Clem, "and the investment gave them a second life." *Bored Of The Rings* was duly transferred over to Silversoft, and the relationship with Delta 4 had begun. "Delta 4 did brilliant games, but I like to think we made their name by bringing them out to a wider audience," Clem tells us, and the deal was done on a game-by-game basis that ultimately saw four of Delta 4's adventures published by CRL or Silversoft.

## Our destination, the stars

Finally, to bring a curtain down on 1985, CRL released one of the most-loved 8-bit games. Pete Cooke had already proved his worth to Clem, if not the gaming public, with the technical brilliance of *Juggernaut* when the master programmer submitted his next opus. "He had this new graphics system and was using it to design UFOs with lightning in the background," says Clem keenly, "and he just took it from there to *Tau Ceti*, building in all the elements and plot."

It's obvious that Clem was very excited about Cooke's latest offering: "Pete was just an outstanding talent as far as I was concerned, and I signed the game on the spot. It was obviously leading-edge and novel – a market leader."

Andy Stoddart has similar memories of Cooke's second game for CRL: "*Tau Ceti* demonstrated brilliant use of maths to create graphics from very little data. Clem was always pushing us to find new techniques for getting more out of the computers, so you can imagine his response on seeing it."

As 1986 dawned, CRL was riding high on the success of *Tau Ceti*. However, one avenue that it would gradually wind down was the licensing of other media properties. "I think Ocean's saturation of the market had an effect," says Clem, "and we'd had a few licensed games that never made it out because they were either coupled with freelancers or had stalled under the in-house team." However, he continued to solicit material from third-parties, and CRL formed a bond with the mysterious St Bride's School to produce *Colossal Cave Adventure* spoof *The Very Big Cave Adventure*, as well as the gangster comedy *Bugsy*. "They were nice people, but very unique," says Clem of the Ireland-based developers. "I remember they dressed in Victorian garb and ran a pseudo-school for those who wanted to go back to school for a holiday. Very different!"

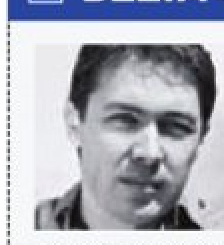






> **"The Zen Room was a giant clubhouse for talented teenagers to make games"**
> CLEM ON HIS IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

### DELTA 4

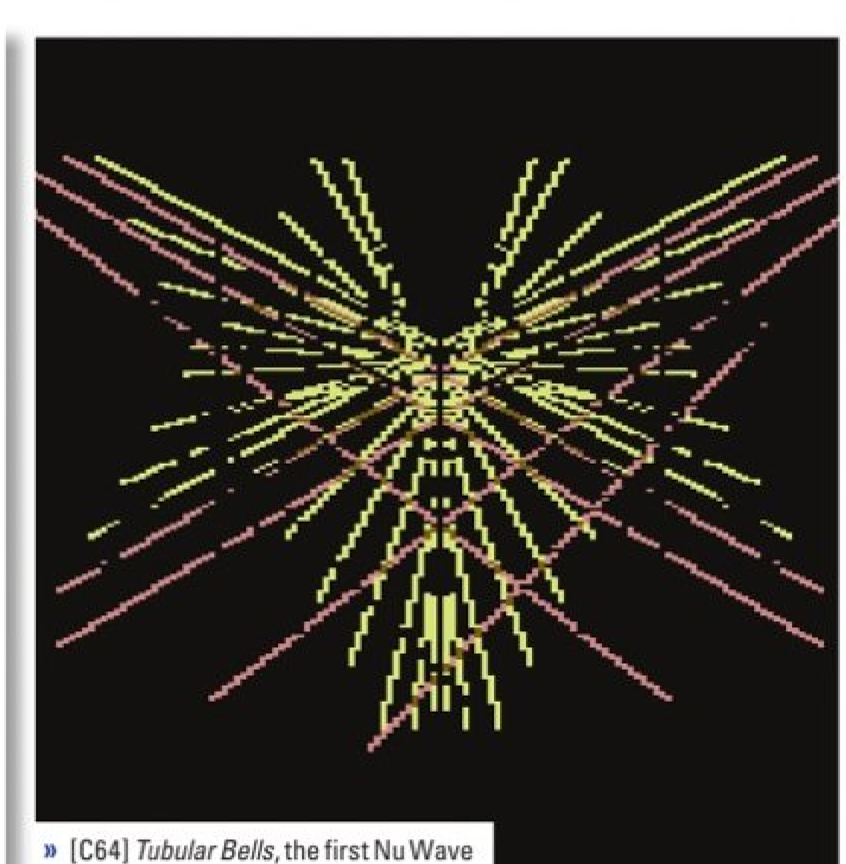


Fergus McNeill remembers his first meeting with Clem Chambers fondly: "His incredible enthusiasm was quite infectious and it wasn't long before I was working on another parody game for them." Fergus's reasons for dealing with the publisher rather than market the games under the Delta 4 banner were clear. "Magazines were reluctant to review games from what they perceived as a 'bedroom coder', so we needed a publisher behind us. CRL had the relationships with WHSmiths, Boots and the other high street retailers, which meant sales of our games multiplied by a huge factor," he says. "Also, I didn't want to be spending all day every day packing games into padded envelopes!"

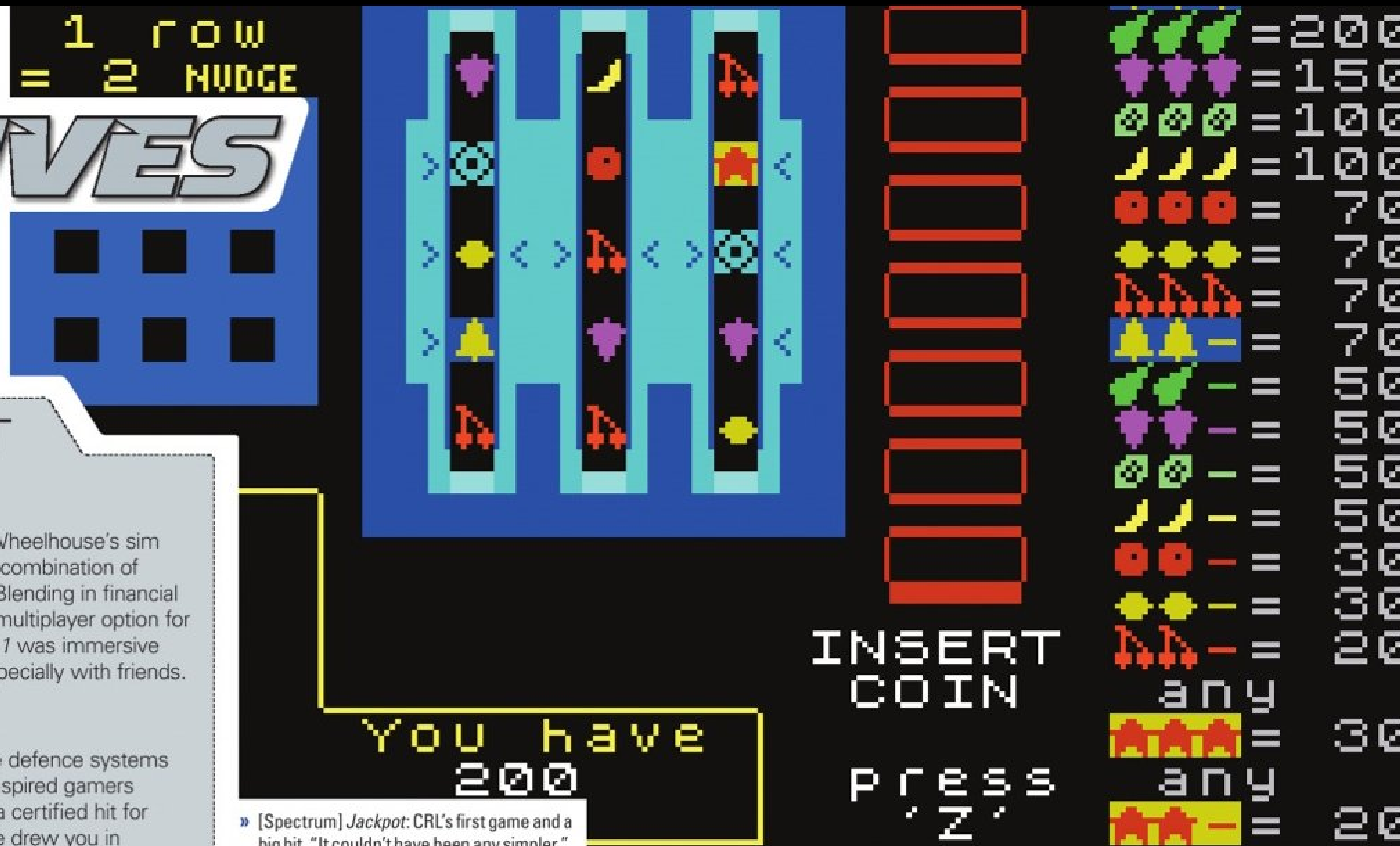
Fergus continues: "I was up at their offices quite regularly discussing ideas and progress and, looking back, it was a wonderfully relaxed way of working, but at the time I thought the concept of deadlines was quite scary!"



» Jeff Lee smiles next to a row of computers and programming peripherals.



» [C64] *Tubular Bells*, the first Nu Wave release, was an interesting failure.




» [Spectrum] *Jackpot*: CRL's first game and a big hit. "It couldn't have been any simpler."

## SIX OF THE BEST



**Formula 1** [1985]
George Munday and BP Wheelhouse's sim was groundbreaking in its combination of racing and management. Blending in financial elements and an exciting multiplayer option for up to six players, *Formula 1* was immersive and hugely enjoyable – especially with friends.



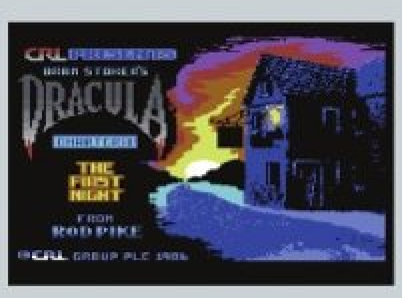
**Tau Ceti** [1985]
Pete Cooke's tale of rogue defence systems and Gal-Corp Skimmers inspired gamers everywhere and became a certified hit for CRL. Its technical brilliance drew you in before the addictive gameplay ate weeks out of your life.



**Bored Of The Rings** [1986]
Ever since he played *The Hobbit*, Fergus McNeill had wanted to work on a Tolkien game. With this never likely and Fergus most comfortable with comedy, a parody was a natural fallback. The result was the amusing yet challenging *Bored Of The Rings*.



**iD** [1986]
An enigma. A puzzle. A mystery to be solved. *iD* was all of these and more. A complex and thought-provoking game, *iD* challenged the player to guess the identity of the person hidden away inside the computer's CPU by asking questions and evaluating answers.

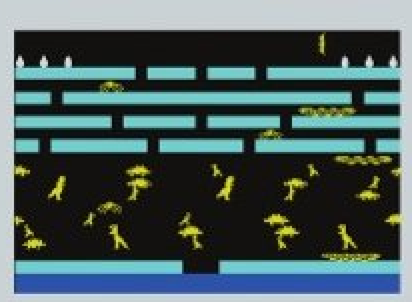


**Dracula** [1986]
Rod Pike's first game for CRL boasted accomplished writing coupled with intense digitised graphics to make a compelling and intimidating adventure, even though the lack of animation meant Clem failed to secure the desired 18 certificate from the BBFC.



**Academy** [1987]
Taking the basic concept of *Tau Ceti*, Cooke expanded the world to encompass multiple missions and locations with the player as a Gal-Corp trainee, learning the ropes of a Skimmer. The ability to design your craft from scratch was a huge innovation at the time.

## THREE TO AVOID



**Caveman** [1983]
We may be being a bit harsh here considering the game was programmed for the 16K Spectrum, but by 1983 it had been proved that the machine was more than capable of producing decent games. *Caveman* was a poor, jerky and unplayable *Frogger* clone.



**Thundercross** [1988]
Undoubtedly a technical achievement thanks to its massive central sprite, *Thundercross* was a horizontally scrolling shooter that unfortunately lacked in the gameplay department. The one redeeming feature was the excellent music by Jay Derrett.



**Doctor What!** [1986]
"A nasty steaming dollop of What" is how *Crash* magazine described this *Doctor Who* parody before awarding it a miserable 17%. To be fair, it wasn't quite as bad as the *Crash* reviewers suggested, but nonetheless was a considerably below-average platformer.

And despite the Zen Room, freelance games were also still being considered by Clem, and one such submission arrived from an adventure enthusiast named Rod Pike. The game was the soon-to-be-infamous *Dracula*. "I loaded the tape up but honestly I wasn't too excited," admits Clem. "Adventure games were tired and dying out by then, and I could have signed tons of them." He saw potential, however, in this new take on an old genre, with the addition of just one element. "I told Rod I thought it could work, but we needed graphics so I could try and spice it up with the first computer game film rating."

### Courting controversy

Clem's idea had stemmed from an article in *The Sun*. 'Video nasties' and the resulting moral panic were still very much a hot topic in the mid-Eighties, and all avenues of media remained under constant scrutiny for extreme or objectionable content. A recently passed computer game clause in the Video Recordings Act was all the incentive CRL needed to make the game as graphic as it dared and submit it to the BBFC for certification. "Their eyes lit up," declares Clem excitedly, "and we pushed hard for an 18 certificate." Ultimately, in a first for games, the BBFC gave *Dracula* a 15 certificate, citing its lack of animation as the main reason. "So in the next game, we made sure it had animation!"



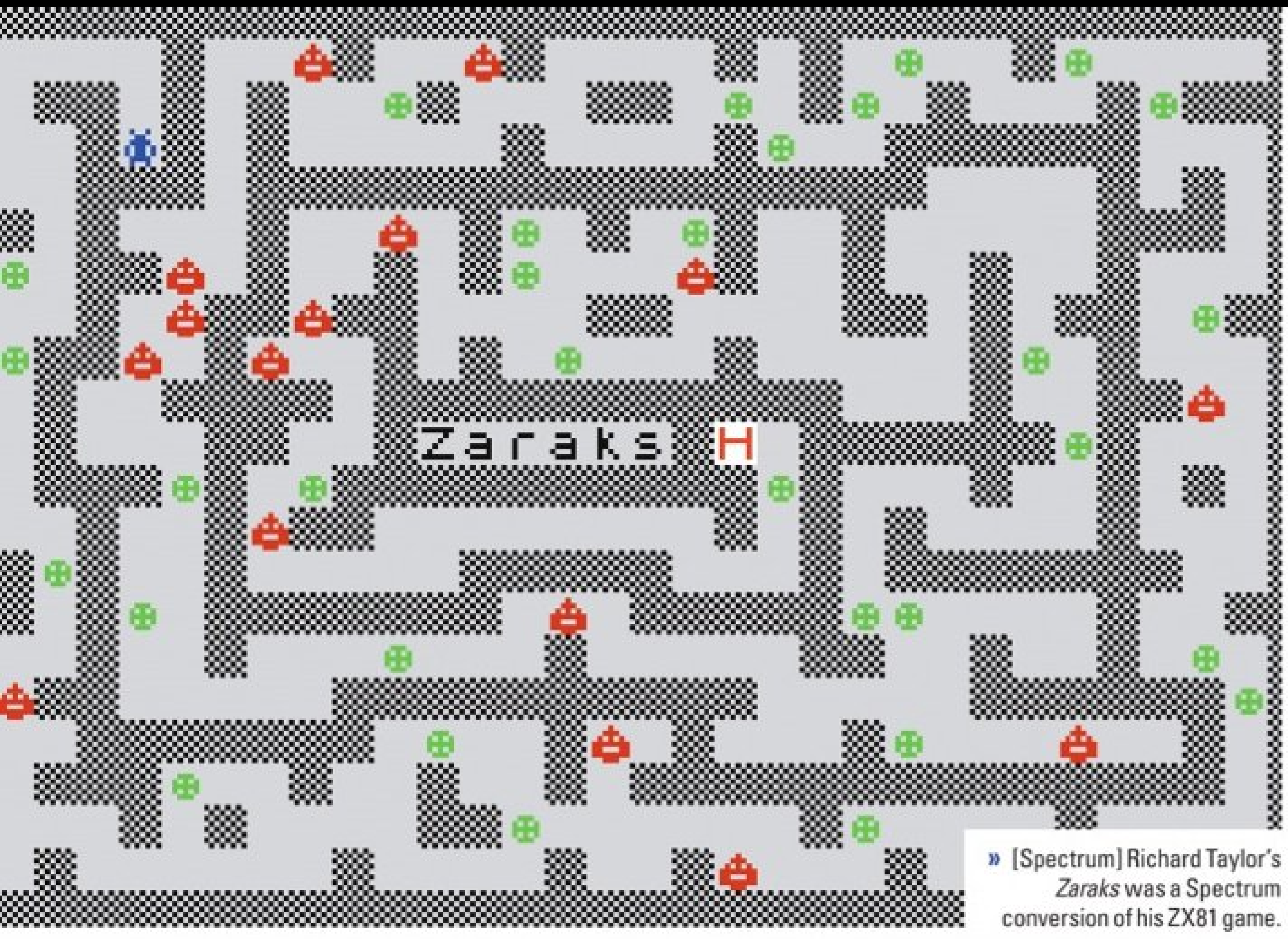
Andy Stoddart helped create the gory animated graphics for these subsequent adventures. "They had used digitisation of real people acting out the various scenes, then the blood and gore was added by the graphic artist," he explains, "and I had to develop the animation software to move the bitmaps and bring it to life without using up too much memory." As a result, a few months later, Clem finally achieved his coveted 18 certificate – another gaming first – with the release of *Jack The Ripper*, a blood-spattered adventure from St Bride's.

1986 also saw the debut of an unsuccessful, if rewarding, label for Clem: Nu Wave. "I remember watching an on-screen hex dump of a BBC Micro's memory ever changing," he says, "and realised computers could do deep stuff like draw fractals and open whole new possibilities. It was obvious this stuff was not, and would never be, in the realms of simple games." Clem concluded that it was time CRL published an alternative to mainstream games, under a new label. "I saw a moiré pattern generator on the C64 on Compunet and thought to myself, 'Bloody hell, strap a licence to that along with some music and it would be wonderfully hypnotic.'"

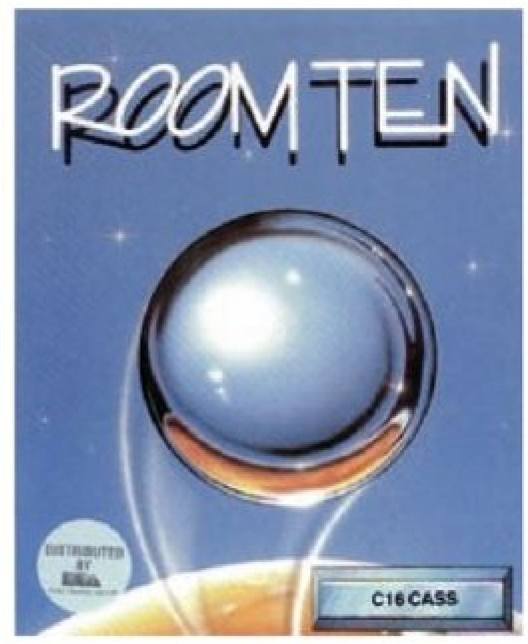
The result was Nu Wave's first release, a computerised interpretation of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*, and it wasn't long before CRL was in discussion with Mel Croucher of Automata about developing a similarly ambitious program. "[Croucher] was like some Frank Zappa figure," recalls Clem with a smile, "only without the market scale to provide a niche for him." CRL and Croucher developed a game called *iD*, an ambitiously original piece of software, which Clem is still proud of today. "Some people class this game as one of the all-time greats, and I've been personally thanked for it even 20 years later. That still gives me a real buzz." The only downside was sales: "I don't think we sold more than 500 copies of *iD*, but the seed was sown."

### Focus on the 64

As the decade moved into its latter stages, CRL dedicated significantly more of its output to the C64. This was a decision made by Clem thanks to two major factors: first was the abundance of C64 programming talent in the Zen Room; second, ever the commercial man, Clem had realised that it was an international market taking in many more countries than the other formats, which of course meant more potential sales. From 1986 through to 1988, CRL released a plethora of C64 shoot-'em-ups as well as an action-adventure that gained much press coverage for featuring a black hero. Unfortunately, *Cyborg* and its sequel,




» [Spectrum] Richard Taylor's *Zaraks* was a Spectrum conversion of his ZX81 game.









*Mandroid*, didn't live up to the hype, although Clem does feel that certain games got an unfair reputation in the press. "I think I was a bit too naive back then to understand the effects that advertising budgets could have on reviews," reflects Clem. "I wasn't really in the same age group as many of the other publishers who were in their 30s, and that naiveté hurt us."

1987 saw CRL trying to capitalise on the success of the previous two years. The tentpole release of the year was undoubtedly *Academy*, Pete Cooke's stunning sequel to 1985's *Tau Ceti*. Boasting a massive array of missions and objectives, *Academy* was a critical and commercial smash that combined superb graphics with an open-ended structure to make an engrossing space adventure. Other notable releases in this year included the isometric *Arkanoid* clone *Ball Breaker*; a game based around the saucy porcine comic *Oink!*; and a step into the game-designer market with *3D Game Maker*, which would be followed in 1988 by *2D Game Maker*.

However, for Clem and CRL, 1987 was to prove an eventful time for less than happy reasons. Rival software house Nexus had been formed in 1986, and its connection with CRL had been noted earlier in the year when both companies had sealed distribution deals with the ambitious US publisher Electronic Arts. Nexus was eager for new talent, and soon Ian Ellery would be moving on, together with Pete Cooke.

"That was a real shame," says Clem, "as that was kind of where their story ended." This is partly true – Cooke, with help from Ellery, produced a predictably outstanding debut game, but Nexus struggled to follow up the brilliant *Micronaut One* with anything of note, and the company quietly disappeared early in 1988, with reported debts of up to £200,000.

## Holed and sinking

Like many of its fellow 8-bit publishers, CRL struggled to make the jump up to the emerging 16-bit computers. "We always seemed to be struggling, 8-bit or otherwise, and everyone was on the road to bankruptcy – some just took longer than others!" says Clem. "We had a couple of nice games on the Amiga, but by the time the 16-bit market was in full swing we were already holed under the waterline by the Electronic Arts fiasco."

The CRL chief is reluctant to opine further on the nature of the dispute – "I don't believe in raking over old muck" – but it's not hard to see where the problem lay. Multiformat magazine *ACE* gleefully welded the word 'divorce' to its news report in June 1988 when rumours of a disagreement between the two companies first began to surface. By the following month, a full legal dispute was under way according to the magazine, with CRL accusing Electronic Arts of "owing them a lot of money under the distribution agreement" and EA countering that the CRL games "just weren't of the high industry standard as stipulated". Whatever the outcome of these unfortunate proceedings, CRL was left in the untenable position of having no distributor for its products. This forced Clem to make redundant all of his development staff during the summer of 1988, leaving behind just the administrative side of the business. A trickle of third-party games followed in 1989, but the writing remained on the wall.

CRL finally closed its doors in 1990. Clem wasn't standing still, having already formed another venture, On-Line PLC, which became one of the first companies to develop both massively multiplayer internet games and CD-ROM software, but that's another story. So, given his success since, how does he look back at his time with CRL?

"I think the best way to put it is that it was like a first love to me," says Clem wistfully. "I wasn't sad to move on but have lots of happy and exciting memories about the time." And who would have thought those painful few words written for a magazine column 30 years ago would eventually turn into a bestselling novel? "Indeed," agrees Clem. "It's funny how life goes round in circles…"

**"We always seemed to be struggling, 8-bit or otherwise"**

CLEM ON LIFE AS A SOFTWARE PUBLISHER

### MAKING WAVES

"I was on the Automata stand at a pre-Christmas Microfair," recalls Mel Croucher, author of CRL sub-label Nu Wave's second program. "We had just been sued by Waddingtons for bringing out a Spectrum version of a property trading game, and someone had produced a collection bucket after I said I'd see them in court – if I could afford the bus fare! A young guy came up, dressed in a leather flying jacket and white scarf, pulled out a tenner and dropped it in the bucket. Later I found out that that had been my first encounter with Clement Chambers."

When the two met up again a few months later it resulted in the groundbreaking and enigmatic *iD*, an attempt at elevating computer games into a more thought-provoking experience that unfortunately failed to inspire the gaming public. "I don't remember doing much work, but it was always good fun. *iD* was Clem's baby really; I just did the gestation and delivery bit. To be honest, I don't remember much money either; maybe it was all covered with that first tenner," says Mel with a smile. "But then he always was a smart boy, that Clem…"



» [Spectrum] An early success was the game dubbed "*Jetpac* underwater", *Glug Glug*.




» [Spectrum] *The Magic Roundabout* was CRL's first official licence and would quickly lead to more.

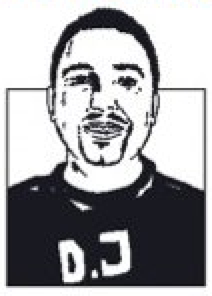
**Special thanks to Clem Chambers, Paul 'Andy' Stoddart, Jeff Lee, Fergus McNeill and Mel Croucher for helping with this feature.**



# Power Strike

## HOW TO START CHRISTMAS WITH A BANG

» RETROREVIVAL



» MASTER SYSTEM
» SEGA
» 1988

**Christmas 1988, and there was only one game I was desperate for: Compile's *Power Strike*. I'd just started work at the age of 15 in a local supermarket, and had already spent pretty much all my spare cash on a Master System that I had bought from my Aunty's club book (remember those old things?).**

The Master System came with *Hang-On*, *Safari Hunt* and *Snail Maze*, the cool little maze game which came built in to the console's BIOS, and I had picked up *Shinobi* and *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, but I was completely cleaned out. I needed a new game to keep me busy over the Christmas break; I needed *Power Strike* badly.

Christmas Day arrived and there was *Power Strike*, no doubt bought from the same catalogue that had supplied me with my cherished Master System. The Master System version was a port of the original MSX game and it included different level variations, one fewer level and no cut-scenes, but I didn't realise any of that at the time; all I knew was that it was absolutely brilliant and one of the most action-packed shoot-'em-ups that I'd played for some time.

A technically impressive port, *Power Strike* featured little of the flickering that could be found on many Master System games of the time, and moved along at an extremely slick pace. What impressed me, and continues to impress me, is the sheer number of sprites that were being thrown around the screen, and while slowdown often reared its ugly head, inventive power-ups and clever enemy patterns meant you were far too busy tackling *Power Strike*'s challenging AI than worry about its occasional technical hiccups. All in all, Sega had created an impressive port.

There weren't many shoot-'em-ups available for the Master System, but titles like *Power Strike* and *R-Type* proved that Sega's 8-bit console was more than up to the task of hosting them, and gave me a lot of enjoyment. *Power Strike* might not have been the best game I bought over Christmas (that honour goes to *Super Star Wars*) but it was certainly the best game that I ever received as a present. *



>> We're back in the Nineties again, with both Sonic and Mario fighting for your attention. This month also sees a steady stream of 3DS releases, covering everything from the excellent Cave Story to yet another iteration of Tetris. Enjoy!

## PICKS OF THE MONTH



**DARRAN**
**Super Mario 3D Land**
A truly great platformer from Nintendo and an original must-own title for the 3DS.



**STUART**
**Sonic Generations**
It has its issues, but it's good to see Sonic Team still learning from *Sonic Colours*.



**DAVID**
**Sonic Generations**
I've been really enjoying *Generations*. A fun platformer and fitting love letter.

# Sonic Generations

## CLASSIC SONIC IS BACK, BUT IS THE CLASSIC GAMEPLAY?

### INFORMATION

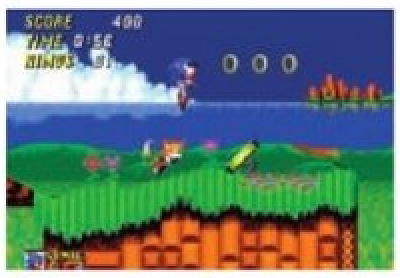
- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, 3DS
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £44.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1

### BRIEF HISTORY

» Sonic span onto the scene back in 1991 and immediately made an impact on gamers thanks to his edgy attitude and blinding speed. He quickly became Sega's talisman, but after a series of classic MD releases, found the transition to 3D to be a tough one. *Colours* and *Generations* prove that Sonic has got his swagger back.

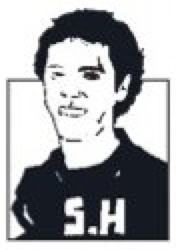
### WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**SONIC 2 (MEGA DRIVE)**



▽ SOMETHING NEW
**SONIC COLOURS (WII)**





**Last year's *Sonic Colours* proved hands-down that a great 3D *Sonic* game was possible if it offered gameplay that was fast, frenetic, exhilarating and replayable. Scoring 90% back in issue 85, it finally broke the cycle after many long years of so-so and disappointing games by Sonic Team, not to mention broken dreams of long-suffering fans.**

*Sonic Generations* is another goody, and has that fast, frenetic *Sonic* gameplay in spades. Its concept is a sound one – 2D Sonic meets 3D Sonic… literally – and proves an excellent way for Sega to not only be respectful to the heritage of one of its biggest superstars, but also give fans both old and new something to take from the festivities.

While Sonic is celebrating his 20th birthday in a park with all his pals, a dark, ominous creature suddenly appears in the sky, creating a time hole and sucking everyone inside. Sonic consequently awakens in a place that looks a bit like hedgehog heaven, where everything is pure white and angelic – heck, there are even pearly gates. When Sonic bumps into his silent and much rounder former self, however, it becomes apparent that he hasn't died; rather the timeline has been skewed and he's stuck in limbo.

As such, you quickly come to realise that this isn't your traditional *Sonic* game, but more a unique and really quite brilliant way for Sega to celebrate a milestone year for one of gaming's biggest icons. Flipping control between 3D and original Sonic while in the heavenly hub world opens up two different acts for each stage, based on a classic zone from a previous *Sonic* game, and this offers the chance to play them in either 2D or 3D, played by their respective 'hog.

Boss battles, however, also require the collection of keys – and, in the case of the final one, all of the Chaos Emeralds – which are obtained by beating challenge gates that offer a hit-or-miss selection of mini-challenges, clearly there to eke more longevity from the adventure. The challenges include goals such as completing a stage in a certain time or with a target number of rings. Some of the less enjoyable ones see Sonic calling upon his friends to help him complete a stage – using Tails to fly him over a long run of spikes, for instance, or an awkward one that the





» [360] During the course of the game, new abilities are introduced, ranging from wall jumping to heavy stomping.




» [360] Levels are based on stages from *Sonic*'s best and worst, namely *Sonic 2* and *Sonic Unleashed*.





## ✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Sonic Generations

>> The 3DS version features the exclusive Casino Night Zone and Mushroom Hill, taken from *Sonic 2* and *Sonic & Knuckles* respectively

>> The boss fights also remix versions of old battles, ones previously seen in *Sonic 2*, *Sonic Adventure* and *Sonic & Knuckles*

>> *Generations* features the original 1991 Mega Drive smash *Sonic The Hedgehog*, reminding you where it all began




» [360] The 2D stages actually better capture the spirit of classic *Sonic* than those in *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*.




» [360] Being able to kit out Sonic with different powers is neat, but you can finish the game without them.

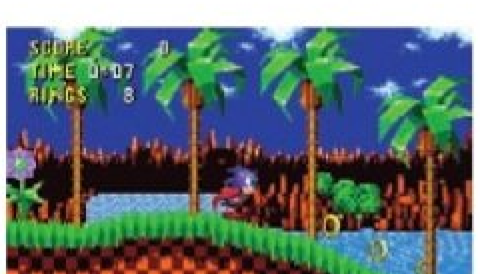
camera truly hates in which Sonic has to chase navigational arrows around to find gold coins for Knuckles to dig up. Thankfully you're not asked to complete many of these to progress, but there are plenty of challenge gates to play through, offering tasks to return to once the credits roll.

Of course, the stars of any *Sonic* game are the stages, and *Generations*' are a nice selection that will raise smiles and tickle nostalgia glands. Fans can experience new HD, remixed versions of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*'s Chemical Plant Zone, *Sonic & Knuckles*' Sky Sanctuary, two of the best stages from the *Sonic Adventure* series, and, taking us up to the modern day, a stage from *Sonic Unleashed* – thankfully a daylight one – as well as one from the excellent *Sonic Colours*, among others.

Seeing Sonic return to his 2D roots and race through new versions of some of the most memorable stages in the series is a treat. Green Hill Zone is beautifully rendered in 3D, and *Sonic Adventure 2*'s City Escape proves to be another standout stage, with Sonic racing down its hilly streets on a snowboard and smashing through parked cars while being harassed for the entire level by the giant truck that provided a small climactic set piece moment in the original. *Generations*' revamped Speed Highway stage, lifted from *Sonic Adventure*, is equally exhilarating and sees Sonic legging it up the sides of tall glass office buildings before smashing through a window to make a terrible mess of the desks and chairs inside, all the while dodging dangers and taking down enemies in a way that Mario could only dream of.

But it's not flawless. There are occasional chokepoints found in some stages, usually the result of annoying enemy placement or the camera simply getting a bit overexcited. Some confusing level design can also create unnecessary faffing and pace-breaking, especially in the 2D stages. Thankfully, though, these moments are rare. Also, for an anniversary pack as hyped as this, we were disappointed not to uncover any developer interviews or behind-the-scenes videos, or maybe something really cool and unexpected, such as a playable version of the unconverted *SegaSonic The Hedgehog* or the awesome *Sonic CD*. But then we guess *Sonic Generations* isn't trying to be your typical anniversary game.

*Generations* is a unique, well done, fun and entertaining celebration of one of gaming's most popular icons, and another solid 3D *Sonic* game to boot. With *Sonic Colours* and now this, it looks like Sonic has finally rediscovered who he is.



## Where are the eggs, man?

NO ANNIVERSARY RELEASE should be without a few goodies for fans to discover. Strangely it's in this area that *Sonic Generations* feels lacking. There are character bios, artwork and music tracks to unlock, but the biggest treat is the chance to play the original 1991 *Sonic The Hedgehog*. You do this by purchasing a Mega Drive controller in the game's item shop and then finding a console in the hub world to plug it into. It seems only the first *Sonic The Hedgehog* is included, although we didn't complete all the challenge gates and 100 per cent the game, so hopefully something is unlocked for doing just that.

## OPINION




*Sonic Generations*' gameplay is a bit of a mixed bag. I love the side-scrolling levels but the modern-style ones sadly suffer from a lot of the same problems that Sonic has faced throughout his new games in the last decade. As an anniversary celebration, however, the clever pastiche of *Sonic* games past is totally without equal. If you love *Sonic* history, this is essential.

**Ashley Day**

## In a nutshell

***Sonic Generations*** **is a unique celebration of everyone's favourite blue spiky mammal. It's not flawless, but it's not far away. We don't expect many fans will be disappointed.**

>> Score **80%**






» [3DS] It takes a little while to get used to the 3D, but it makes a huge impact once you do.




## GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Mario 3D Land

>> *Super Mario 3D Land* shifted an impressive 343,000 copies in its first week on sale in Japan.

>> Die ten times in a level to unlock the Super Tanooki suit, which gives you invincibility.

## WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

**SUPER MARIO BROS. 3** (NES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

**SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2** (Wii)



### MARIO PLAYS HIS OWN GENERATIONS GAME

# Super Mario 3D Land

retro GAMER SIZZLER



**Hopes are riding high on *Mario*'s 3DS outing. Despite a raft of solid games, the 3DS hasn't been the huge success Nintendo was hoping for. It basically needs a killer app. It basically needs *Super Mario 3D Land*.**

*Ocarina Of Time* and *Starfox 64* were both excellent releases, but they were safe bets, being updates of past classics. *Super Mario 3D Land*, while borrowing heavily from past *Mario* games, stands proudly on its own two feet, and is not only the best platformer on the system but also the best showcase so far for the 3DS itself.

Much has been made of Nintendo's attempt to create true platforming in a 3D environment, and Mario's latest adventure succeeds admirably. Although it takes a few levels to adjust to *3D Land*'s perspective, you'll soon be able to nail jumps with expert precision, and it quickly becomes a joy to navigate the beautifully constructed worlds. And what clever worlds they are. Some utilise a top-down effect – and a dizzying sense of perspective – while others offer a side-on approach, or offer a huge 360-degree canvas to explore. And exploration is definitely the name of the game, with the new 3D perspective creating lots of secret nooks and crannies for Mario to find.

*Super Mario 3D Land* is also a loving tribute to past *Mario* games. It doesn't handle it quite as well as Sega's *Sonic Generations*, but the eight worlds feature elements from *Super Mario 64*, *Mario World*, *Super Mario Bros.* and, most obviously, *Super Mario Bros 3*.

The level design isn't as meticulous as those in *Super Mario Galaxy 2* but there's very little in it. It's not until you start trying to retrieve the three coins found on each stage that you realise just how clever the stage designs actually are. You won't find multiple missions like in *Super Mario 64*, but you will discover challenging bosses, gorgeous environments, exceedingly clever ways to interact with them and lovely little touches, like using a pair of binoculars to spot Toad so that he can reveal the location of an otherwise hidden coin.

The six-or-so hours it takes to complete breezes by, but then *Super Mario 3D Land* plays its trump card – an additional eight huge worlds to explore. These levels are more closely based on *Super Mario Galaxy*, and range from being chased by Shadow Mario to continually collecting clocks so that you can complete a stage in the allotted time. Filled with imagination and also enabling you to play as Luigi (you can switch between both characters and re-visit the normal worlds as often as you wish), it adds significantly to an already great game and proves that, when it comes to platformers, nobody does it better than Nintendo or Mario.

## INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £39.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD TOKYO
- **PLAYERS:** 1

## BRIEF HISTORY

» Mario made his first appearance in *Donkey Kong*, under the name of Jump Man. He quickly went on to star in his own adventures, such as *Wrecking Crew*, *Super Mario Bros.* and *Super Mario 64*, and is now one of the most iconic videogame characters of all time.

## OPINION



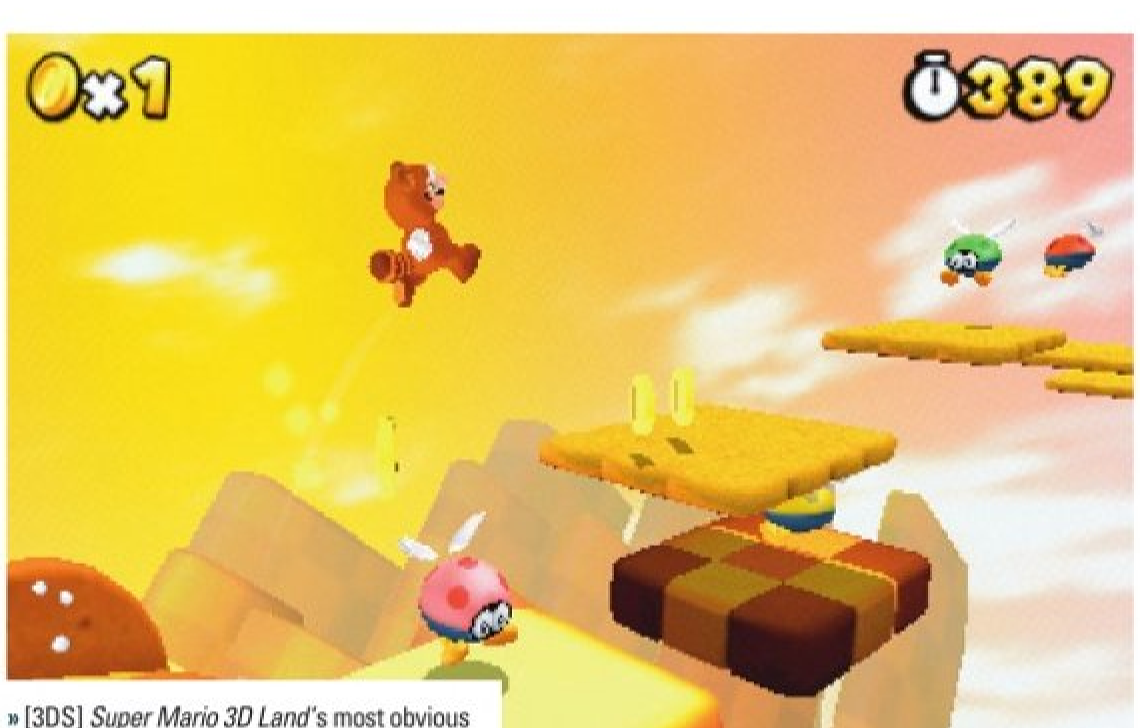

*Super Mario 3D* demonstrates a better showcase for the 3DS than any other title to date. More crucially though, it's also a great *Mario* game, containing all the classic staples you would hope and expect. Both these things combine to make it an essential 3DS purchase.

**Stuart Hunt**

## In a Nutshell

***Super Mario 3D Land* is not only an exceptionally designed platformer, but is also a loving tribute to Mario's past.**

>> **Score 94%**




» [3DS] *Super Mario 3D Land*'s most obvious homage is to *Super Mario Bros 3*.






PS3




## House Of The Dead OVERKILL Extended Cut

» **SYSTEM:** PS3 » **PRICE:** £49.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **Sega's tribute to** grindhouse thoroughly tickled us when we first encountered it on the Wii. This new effort is a great improvement on the original, and adds a surprising number of enhancements, ranging from new weapons to a brand new playable character in the form of stripper Candy Stryper, and two brand new levels.

Otherwise it's business as usual, which means lots of gore, some truly (intentionally) terrible acting and liberal uses of the F-Bomb, as Agent G and his partner Isaac Washington shoot down hordes of zombies in their quest to bring down Papa Caesar.

Like many light gun games it suffers from repetition, but plenty of extras ensure that *OVERKILL* doesn't suffer in the longevity stakes. Tasteless and gory, but fantastic fun all the same.

>> Score **84%**

## Blazblue Continuum Shift II

» **SYSTEM:** 3DS » **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

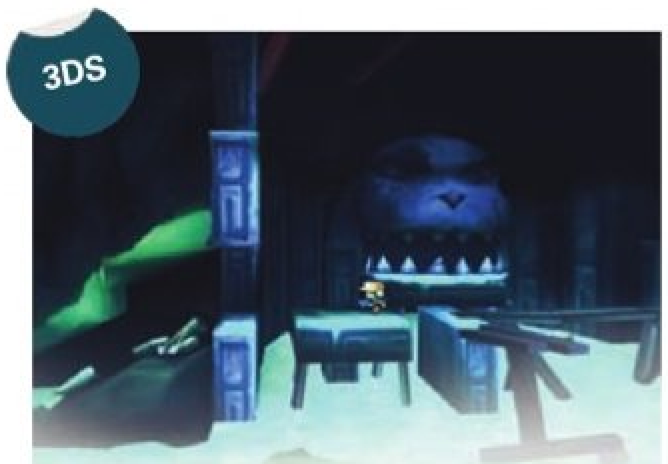
3DS




>> **Though an impressive** port, *Street Fighter IV 3D* streamlined the controls for 3DS owners. *Shift II* reflects the opposite of the spectrum, a tactile and deep combo-focused fighter, full of moves, characters and strategy set to put the console and its controls through its paces. And while there's no denying this port is full of content and offers a decent enough portable rendition of the console version, it could be better. The 3D effect is disappointing, not contributing anything other than a frame-rate drop, and even with the 3D slider cranked down the animation isn't as fluid as fans will be used to. Add in the lack of online multiplayer, and how the 3DS's D-pad and small buttons don't feel like the best tools for the job, and you're left with a port solid in some areas but lacking in others.

>> Score **74%**

3DS



## Cave Story 3D

» **SYSTEM:** 3DS
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **This new 3D** iteration of the classic PC game finds itself in a difficult position. On one hand, its translation to 3D has been handled beautifully, and it controls just like the 2D original; on the other hand, little has been added to the core game and it's four times the price of its WiiWare counterpart. Get over the price, and *Cave Story 3D* proves itself to be an excellent game, retaining all the elements that made the PC original such a joy to play. It's just a pity that bar a few cursory additions, so little has been added to the original.

>> Score **85%**

360



## GoldenEye 007 Reloaded

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **PRICE:** £49.99
» **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (2-16 ONLINE)

>> **Last year's loose** remake of *GoldenEye* returns, and it's been given a high-definition makeover. While the enjoyable single-player game remains the same, a new set of challenges called MI6 Ops adds to its longevity. The multiplayer has also been significantly overhauled, with four new maps and numerous other additions. It doesn't shine as brightly as its Wii debut, but *GoldenEye 007 Reloaded* remains great fun all the same.

>> Score **75%**

3DS




## Tetris 3D

» **SYSTEM:** 3DS
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1 -4

>> **While *Tetris 3D*** brings plenty of new ideas to the table (new power-ups, AR-enhanced modes) it lacks the charm of the original DS game, which we still regularly play. It's still *Tetris*, so the core gameplay remains great fun, but the inconsistent game modes – that range from the great to the truly dire – ugly avatar support and eye-straining 3D make it hard to recommend over the original DS game. It's sensibly priced compared to most 3DS games though, and there's no denying that enjoyable core gameplay.

>> Score **70%**

retro GAMER SIZZLER

iOS



## Space Junk

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPAD
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Any spare minute** we have is currently spent trying to smash the office high score on this slick *Asteroids* clone. With its gorgeous vector graphics giving it the feel of a long-lost Vectrex shooter, *Space Junk* is a stunning effort with bags of replay value. Bonus points can be earned by collecting spanners and completing bonus rounds, while a nice mixture of cool weapons keeps the gunplay exciting. With solid controls, authentic Eighties sounds and simple gameplay, it whisks you back to a bygone time.

>> Score **90%**

# RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

## ✱ DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

# Daytona USA

**INFORMATION**
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £6.29
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★★★








**It's hard to believe, but after 18 years Sega's racer finally has an arcade perfect port. In fact it's better, as it features several additions – including high-def textures and widescreen support – to ensure it's acceptable for today's more discerning gamer.**

Similar nips and tucks have been applied to *Daytona USA*'s gameplay modes, ensuring that the deceptively deep racer offers plenty of additional challenge should you ever eventually master its three core tracks.

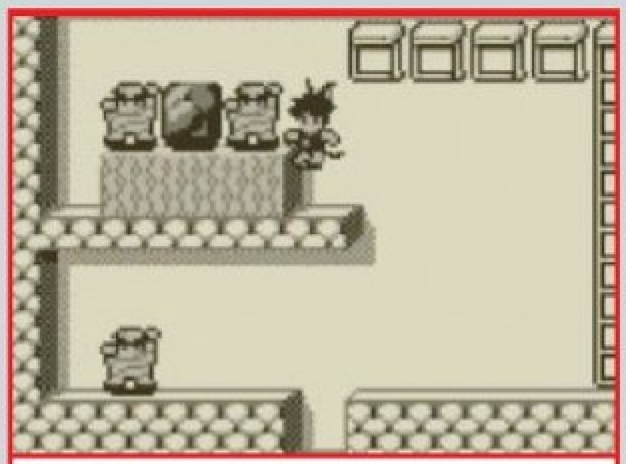
Survival mode sees you continually lapping *Daytona*'s oval track for as long as possible, continually rewarding you with small increments of time for overtaking other vehicles, drifts and other tricks, while Karaoke mode simply puts lyrics onscreen, so you can sing along to the cheesy tracks. A Challenge mode is also included, and requires you to complete numerous tasks of varying difficulty. Add in an excellent online mode and *Daytona USA*, like *Guardian Heroes* before it, proves that it is possible to improve on perfection – one of the best arcade racers of all time gets just a little bit better.

## >> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



### Space Channel 5 Part 2
- » **System:** Dreamcast
- » **Buy it for:** £6.29
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» Ulala's second adventure didn't originally appear on the Dreamcast in the UK, so this port is highly welcome. While its tunes aren't quite as catchy as those of the original, *Space Channel 5 Part 2* remains a lot of fun thanks to its entertaining characters, new gameplay mechanics, (including instrument battles, and a new battle mode) and even more Space Michael. A highly entertaining sequel.



### Catrap
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £2.70
- » **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» Now this is a nice take on the puzzle and platform genres. Each single-screen level has a set number of enemies, and you must destroy every single one in order to continue. Things become harder as objects start getting in the way to mess up your plans, while later stages (there are a 100 in total) require you to constantly flip between two characters, further adding to the brain strain.



### Silent Hill
- » **System:** PSone
- » **Buy it for:** £5.49
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» *Silent Hill* remains a truly unsettling experience, even after all this time. Yes, its sequel is arguably the better game, but Team Silent's first stab at the survival-horror genre still manages to get so many things right. The story remains riveting, and the puzzles genuinely headscratching, while the monsters remain some of the sickest to be found in the series. Just don't play it in the dark.



### Alone In The Dark 1+2+3
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» Yes, the graphics look dated, but *Alone In The Dark*'s chilling story remains as gripping as ever. Certain areas of the game and its mechanics now feel a little clunky, but there's no denying the fact that it remains an amazingly atmospheric experience. It also represents great value for money, as parts *2* and *3* are also included. Another essential download from GOG.

## ▾ PSN

It's a quiet month for PlayStation owners, with few new titles.

### Arc The Lad
- » **System:** PSone
- » **Buy it for:** £3.99
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

### GaiaSeed
- » **System:** PSone
- » **Buy it for:** £3.99
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Sega Bass Fishing: Move Edition
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £6.29
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Speedball 2: Evolution
- » System: PSP
- » Buy it for: £2.49
- » Buy it from: PSN
- » Score: ★★★★☆

## ▾ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

We knew it wouldn't last. After a strong start, Nintendo slows down its Virtual Console 3DS releases. Things are even worse if you're a Wii owner; nothing has been released since June.

### Adventure Island
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £2.70
- » **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### BurgerTime Deluxe
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £2.70
- » **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Golf
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £2.70
- » **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Mega Man: Dr. Wily's Revenge
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £3.60
- » **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

## ▾ PC SERVICES

It's a relatively quiet period for PC owners this month. Even so, there's still some cracking titles, thanks to Little Big Adventure 2 and the MDK games.

### Broken Sword 4: The Angel Of Death
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.21)
- » **Buy it from:** GOG.com
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Giants: Citizen Kabuto
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** 9.99euro (£8.73)
- » **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Little Big Adventure 2
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

### MDK
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** 5.99 euro (£5.13)
- » **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

### MDK 2
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** 9.99euro (£8.73)
- » **Buy it from:** xxxxxxx
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Might And Magic 9
- » **System:** PC
- » **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

### Speed Busters: American Highways
- » **System:** OC
- » **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

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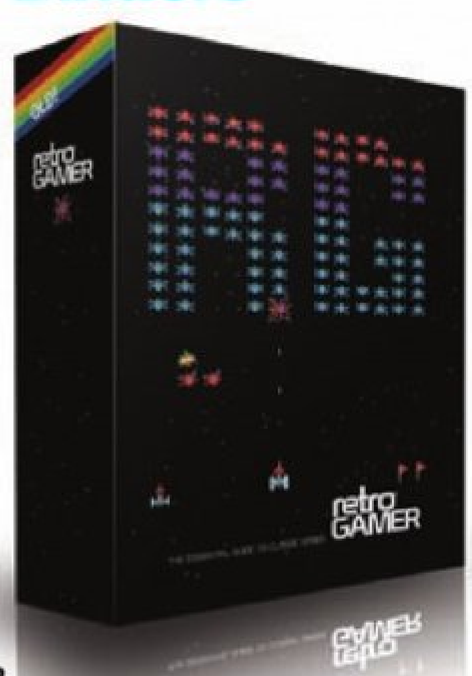



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### Binders

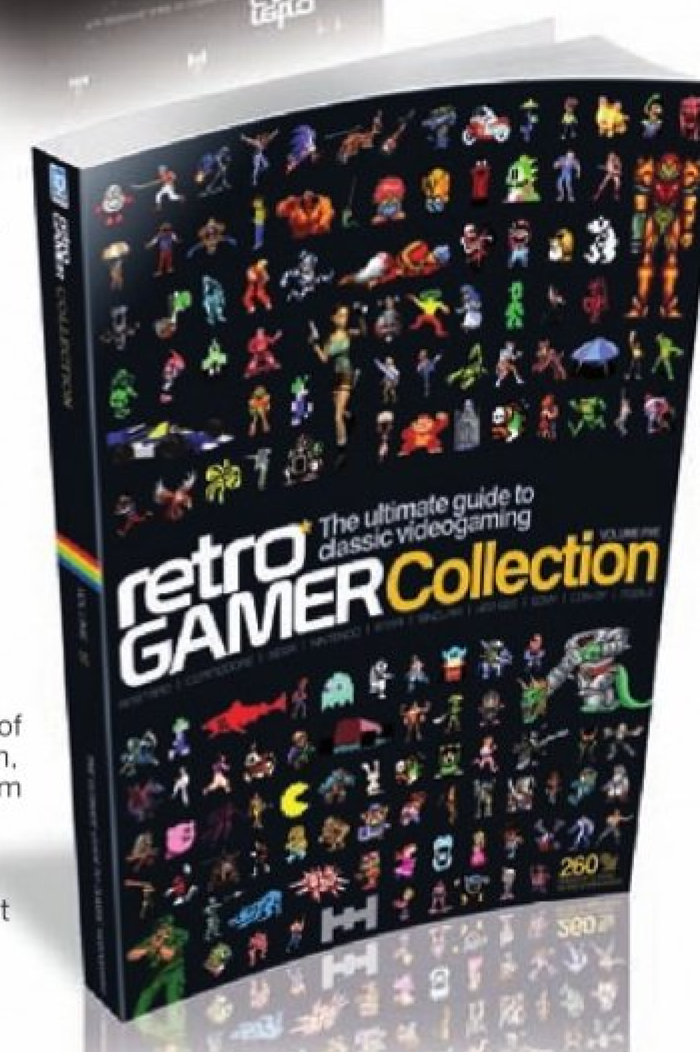


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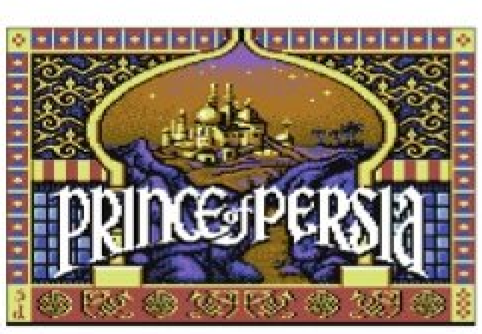
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# HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



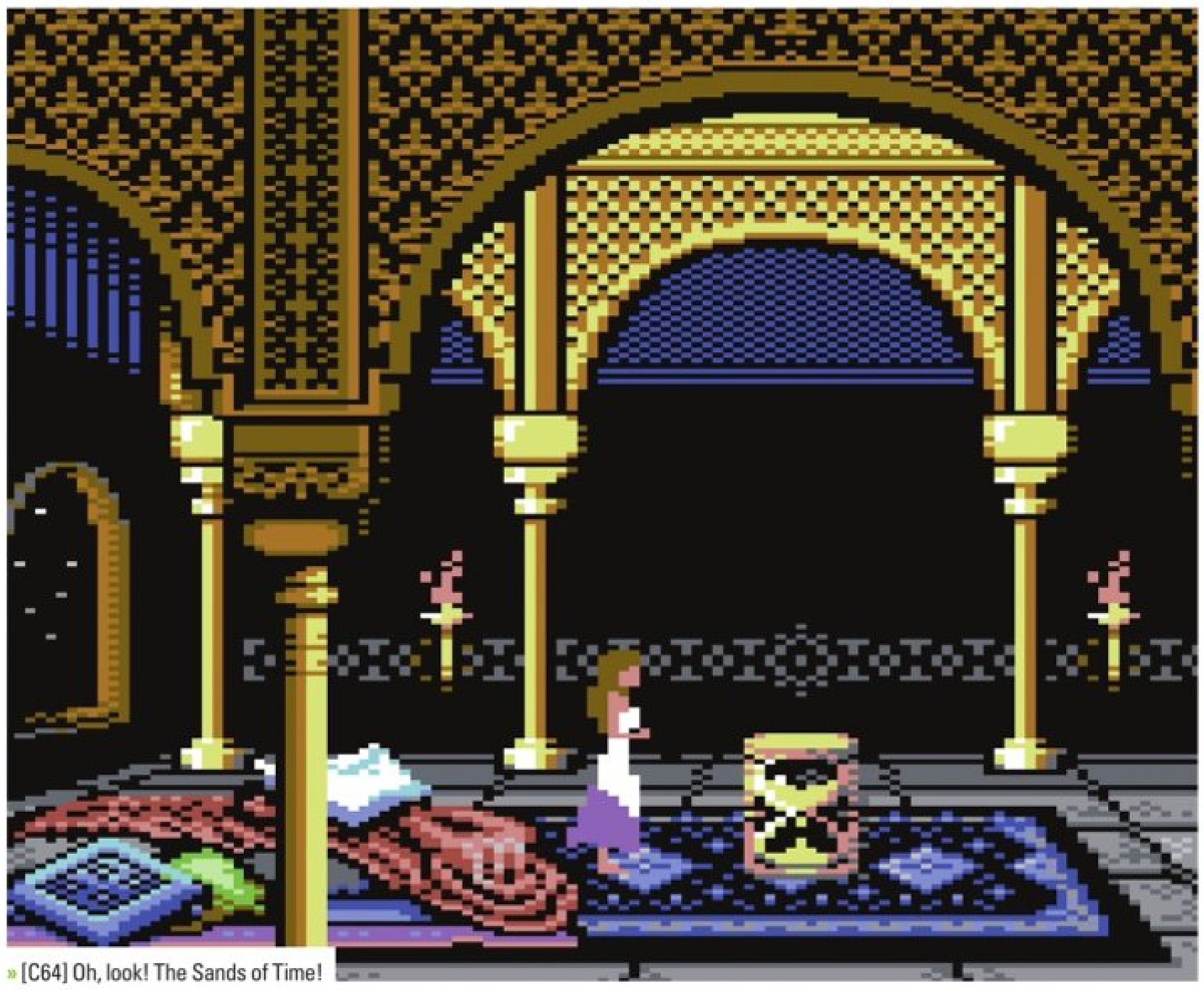

**I've found myself in a couple of discussions on expansions, in particular whether they are true to the spirit of the 8-bits. I feel the current examples are, because Prince Of Persia on the C64 or Space Harrier on the Atari use the cartridge in the way Atari 2600 developers used to. The bigger add-ons like Turbo Chameleon are a more complicated question…**



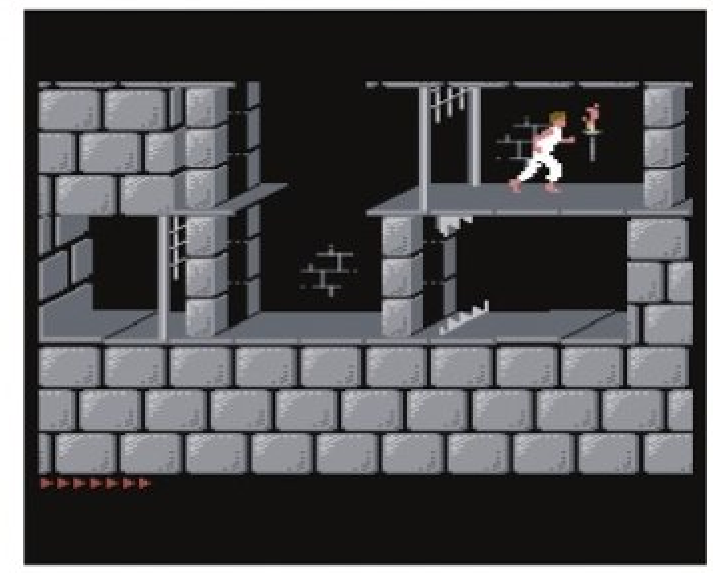

» **FORMAT:** C64
» **DEVELOPED BY:** ANDREAS VARGA
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/POP-64
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** FREE

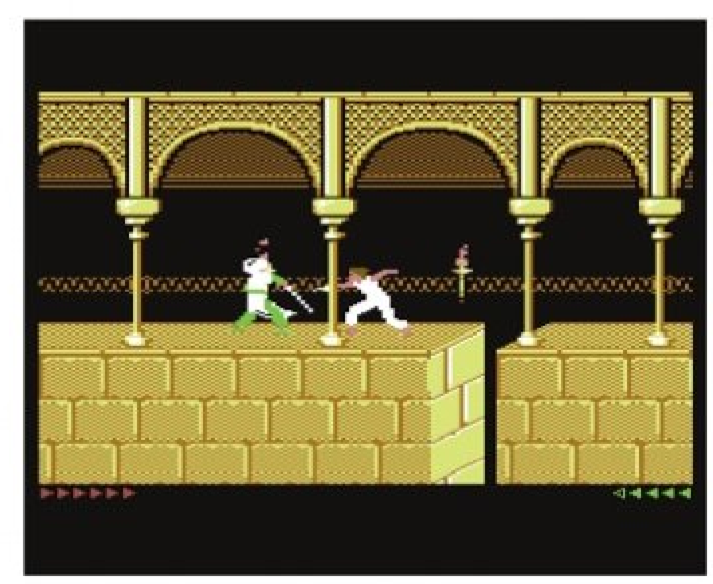
# PRINCE OF PERSIA

## I WANT FOR GLORY'S HOUR, FOR WEALTH'S ESTEEM



» [C64] Oh, look! The Sands of Time!





**Grand Vizier Jaffar has been getting ideas above his station and, in the absence of the Sultan, has become a tyrant, oppressing the masses and generally not being nice. The Sultan's daughter stands between him and the throne, so his latest move sees the poor princess threatened with marriage or death, with just one hour to decide. Her only hope is her true love, cast into the dungeons but not about to let miles of dank corridors stand in his way.**

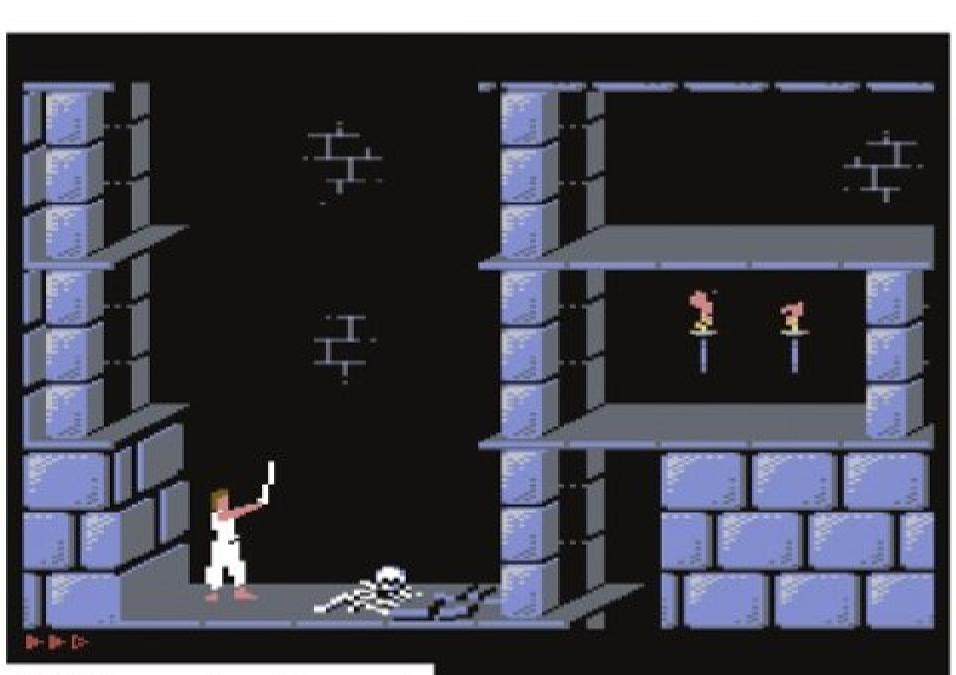
There's a lot of dungeon to work through, in fact, and not all of it is benign; spike traps wait to skewer escapees, sword-wielding guards block the passages, weakened floors fall over gaping pits, and there are metal chompers that do exactly that. Our hero even fights his own dark side, ripped from him by an enchanted mirror.

This C64 iteration of *Prince Of Persia* should immediately feel at home to anybody who has previously enjoyed the Apple II original – or indeed one of the conversions based on it – since it's been built on original developer Jordan Mechner's code; everything works as it always has, even down to the features and quirks that experienced players have learnt to exploit over the years. And, although the graphics have been reworked to take advantage of the C64's multicolour mode and have subsequently lost some of their detail, those trademark animations still look excellent as the kid runs, leaps, hangs or duels.

For new players, the control system will take some acclimatising to, but it offers a large range of options: the kid can run, walk, duck down, climb up or down between levels of the dungeon, and leap either from a standing start or with a run-up – all from just four directions and one fire button!

*Prince Of Persia* has become something of an 8-bit holy grail over the years, with half-completed corpses littering software archives for several platforms. One of the major stumbling blocks is memory, as the original requires 128K to run because it's jammed full of graphics. Getting the entire thing into a C64 was always going to mean paring things down or some form of memory expansion; programmer Andreas Varga went for the latter, opting to use the recently developed EasyFlash cartridge. That does mean it won't be playable on a real C64 without new hardware, but fans can at least try it out beforehand with the latest version of the VICE emulator.

**94%**



» [C64] Did anyone lose a letter opener?



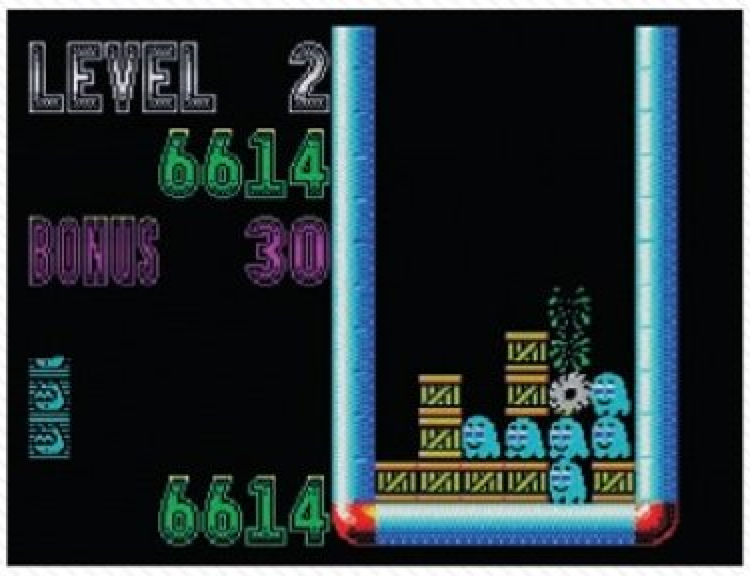
» [C64] A ghost dance is preparing.

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
**retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

# BUZZSAW+ FOXTON LOCKS MIX

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** JASON 'JOEFISH' RAILTON » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BUZZSAW-FLM » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Spectrum] Buzzsaws work on ghosts?

**Jason Railton's amazing-looking** and remarkably colourful *Buzzsaw+ Foxton Locks Mix* was inspired by an obscure Namco coin-op called *Cosmo Gang The Puzzle*. Groups of three objects drop into the playfield, and the first priority is to keep the work space as clear as possible; crates can be removed if horizontal rows are formed, while cute critters need to be wiped out with spinning buzzsaws, weights or exploding stars. Splattering the quota of cuteness will move the game up a level.

The first couple of stages won't be too taxing, but as the game speeds up and becomes less generous with the weaponry, players will find themselves needing to work out strategies to survive. *Buzzsaw+* deserves a look because it's technically remarkable but, more importantly, there's a very competent and challenging game behind that bling.

**82%**

# PEPPER 2

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** GDX
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PEPPER-2 » **PRICE:** FREE

**The MSX has** been graced with quite a few arcade conversions over the years, but *Pepper 2*, released in 1983 by Exidy, wasn't one of them until a couple of homebrewers took it upon themselves to port the ColecoVision version.

The game itself is similar in concept to coin-op paint-'em-up *Amidar*. The play area is divided into areas that must be captured by drawing around their edges. Fill a space with an item inside and the goodies within its boundaries are handed over for use against the enemies. Because the play area is more than a single screen in size, the four exits to each screen can be used to nip back and forth between areas at will.

It might be a simplistic, old-school maze game, but *Pepper 2* can become extremely engrossing, especially on the later stages. For players who like a little extra challenge, there are four difficulty settings to choose from.

**81%**

» [MSX] That authentic ColecoVision look.






» [Spectrum] That'll do nicely.

# SPACE DISPOSAL

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL JENKINSON
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SPACE-DISPOSAL » **PRICE:** FREE

**Your mission is** to seek out brave new worlds… and clean up the litter! There are four rubbish-strewn planets, linked together by portals, which refuse to allow intergalactic trash operatives through unless every last piece of space debris has been dealt with. Additionally, along with blazing balls of fire crashing down from the heavens, there are long-abandoned but still active security systems to work around. And who knows? Some of this stuff might be worth a bob or two!

As shoot-'em-ups go, *Space Disposal* is fun but a little odd in that blasting things won't add to the score – only grabbed items are worth points. The planets themselves aren't particularly large either so, despite the difficulty and indeed frustration levels occasionally being given a shove upwards by the erratic movement of security drones or random positioning of meteorites, it probably won't take most gamers long to collect the junk and get to the intergalactic portal for the journey home.

**66%**

# WHAT'S BREWING?

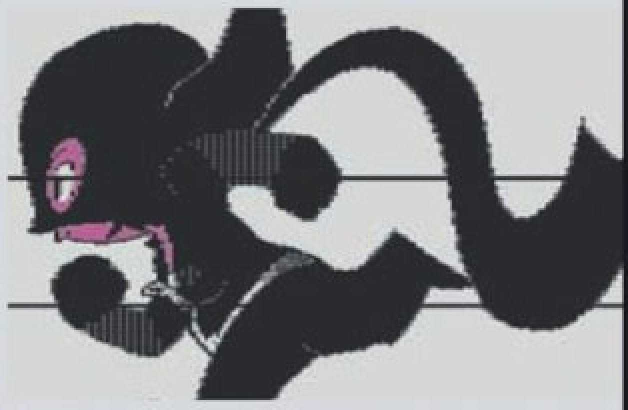
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Spectrum] A life on the ocean wave.

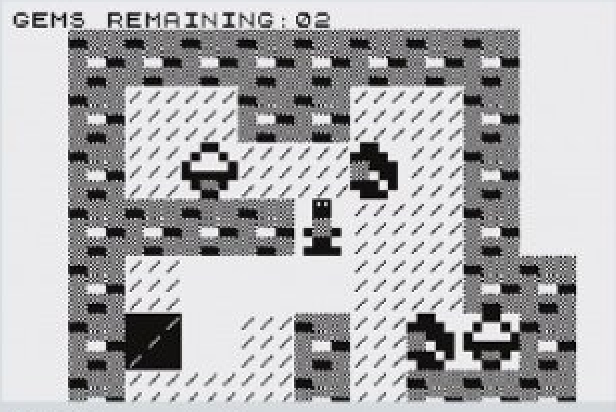
## >> Row, row, row

We mentioned Jonathan Cauldwell's newest Spectrum game while covering the Homebrew Coding Weekend 2 a couple of issues back and now it's complete and available to buy from Cronosoft's website over at **cronosoft.co.uk**. The action centres on a boat that constantly drifts back and forth, while the player controls its turret to shoot down clouds and raise the water level and the bonus items below.


» [Atari 8-bit] Mighty Jill is off!

## >> Five for the price of one

The ninth ABBUC software contest finished recently and there were five new games entered – at the time of writing they're only available to members but should have turned up by the time this sees print. This year's games were western shoot-out *Sheriff's Job*, puzzlers *Marbled* and *Roxblox*, board game *StarRoad*, and a conversion of Anna Anthropy's sadistic platformer, *Mighty Jill Off*. **kikstart.eu/abbuc-2011**



» [ZX81] Can you dig it?

## >> In a mine the whole day through

*Miner Man* is a new, *Boulder Dash*-inspired Xbox Live Indie Game. There's nothing unusual about that, but it comes in a second flavour: expanded ZX81! This conversion by Bob Smith lacks the cosmetic finesse, and indeed a few of the levels and features had to fall by the wayside, but it still plays a mean game in 8,192 times less memory! **kikstart.eu/miner-man**



## WHAT IS ARMALYTE?

**The C64 had no problem producing slick shoot-'em-ups, as Armalyte proves. Published by Thalamus and coded by John Kemp and Dan Phillips, it has all the ingredients you would hope for: stunning visuals, solid controls, satisfying power-ups, great music, splendid level design, and, of course, loads of enemies to shoot**

# THE REMAKING OF ARMALYTE

We speak to the coders behind remakes of classic games and retro-inspired indie titles, and find out what drives them. This month it's Trevor 'Smila' Storey and Stuart Collier, of the homebrew outfits Ovine By Design and S-A-S Designs, and we discover more about their stunning PC remake of the Thalamus C64 classic, Armalyte

**Retro Gamer: Why did you decide to remake *Armalyte*?**

**Trevor Storey:** *Armalyte* is one of my favourite C64 games, so it's always been there nagging away at the back of my mind. It all came about when I was doing some new covers for the *Creatures*/*Creatures 2* re-releases by Psytronik. I was asked by Jason 'Kenz' Mackenzie if we'd like to do a PC version of one of the games already released through Psytronik. I said it would be cool if he could get us the go-ahead to do *Armalyte*, he spoke to Andy Roberts – an old workmate of mine – who holds the IP, and we got the go-ahead.

**RG: What do you like about the original?**

**TS:** Firstly the graphics grabbed me; beautifully drawn and animated, and the number of enemies and bullets on screen wowed me too. But it's the gameplay that really shone. Two players was such a blast and the music and sound effects weren't too shoddy either.




» [PC] *Armalyte*'s original coder, Dan Phillips, and artist, Robin Levy, kindly offered their services as consultants on the remake.

**"As with all remakes, it was easier to start from scratch than use original code and level data"**




**Stuart Collier:** I have fond memories of the original. The sheer number of sprites on screen felt like a proper arcade shooter. The game was easy to learn but hard to master; learning the enemy patterns was a big part of the game, and once you died you had to just try it one more time. I never finished the original – only under emulation with a trainer – but that's more down to me being crap playing games. I love them but can't always master them.

**RG: Were you able to access the original source code?**

**TS:** Stuart did it all from scratch, the bloody fool.

**SC:** We were offered some source code – an incomplete Game Boy version, I recall. As with all of our remakes, though, it was easier to start from scratch rather than use original code and level data. The enemy patterns were redesigned by Trevor using our bespoke wave editor. Ours used spline code to produce that silky smooth appearance. The levels were painstakingly re-created from level screenshots by Trevor.

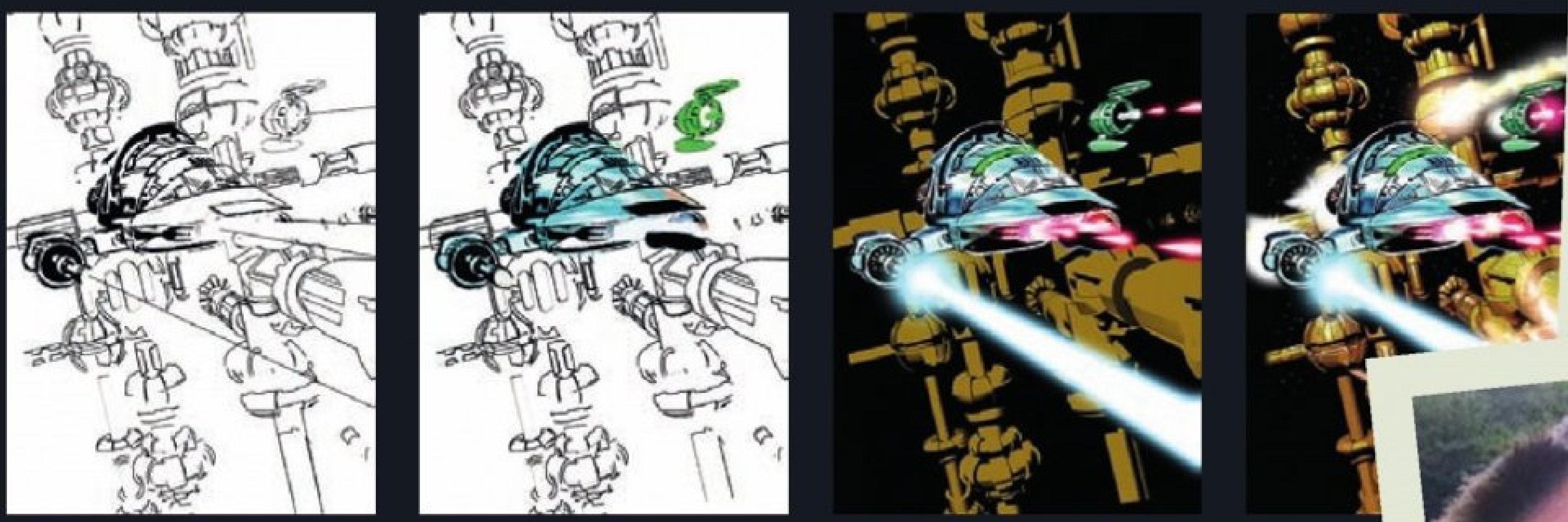
**RG: How long did the remake take and how many people worked on it?**

**SC:** There were three of us working on the project: Stu, Trevor, and Chris Bailey doing music. We did have Dan Phillips and Robin Levy as creative consultants. It was interesting getting their views and a bit of insight on how and why they did certain things. It was good having so many eyes on the project, and I feel we did it justice. I think it took about seven months of part-time coding to get it finished. We decided to rebrand ourselves as S-A-S Designs so as not to confuse with our free remakes under our usual Ovine By Design banner.

**RG: What's the biggest technical problem you faced and how did you solve it?**

**TS:** Those bloody attack patterns. I knew what kind of editor I needed to create them, but the thought of writing down every attack pattern from the original filled me with fear and dread. I still get nightmares today.

**SC:** The hardest part of the entire project was breaking the eight-sprite barrier –





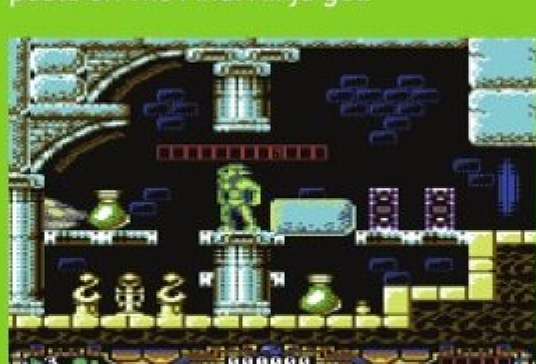
» Trevor Storey

» Stuart Collier

## TREVOR AND STUART DISCUSS THEIR NEXT PROJECTS...

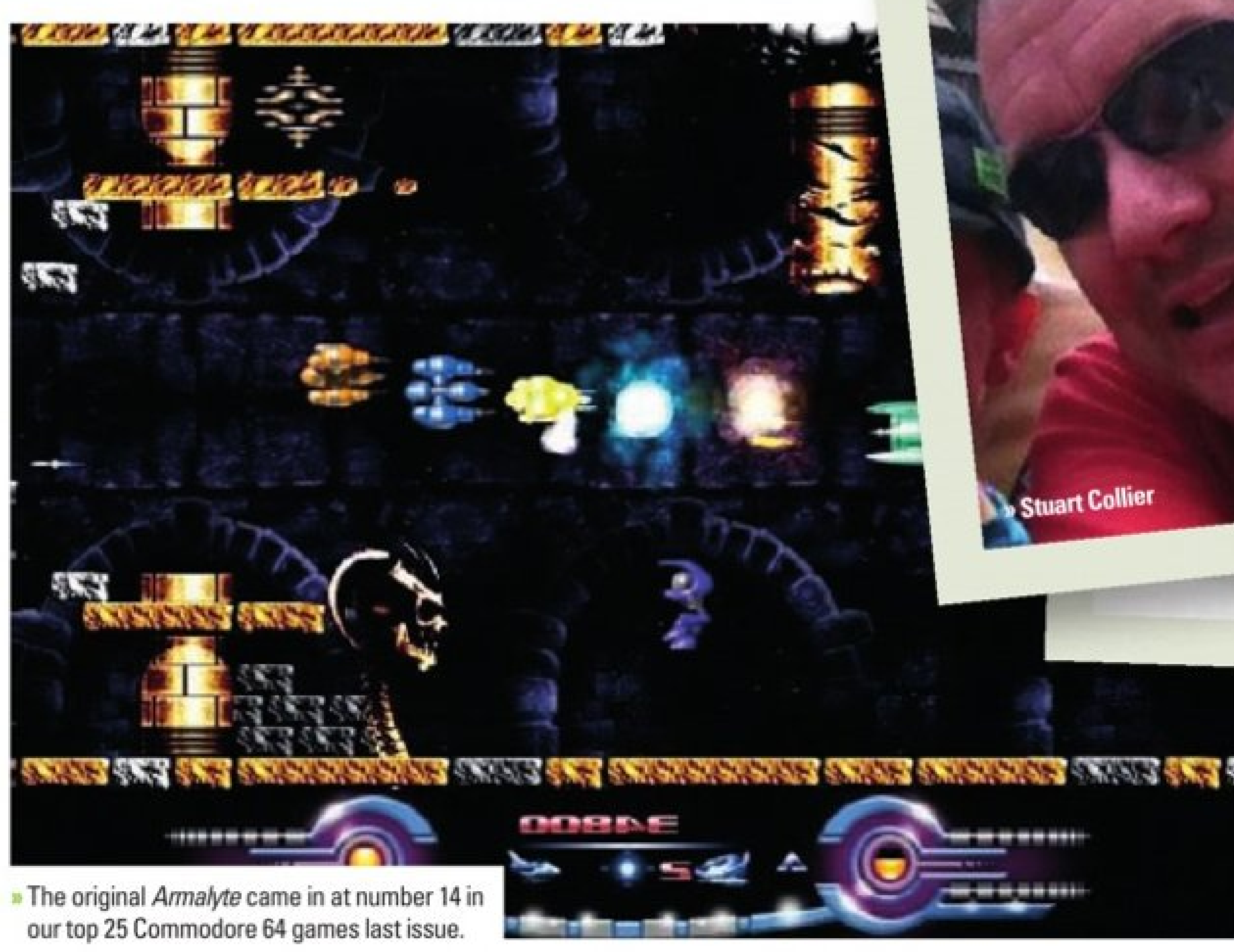
**Trevor:** Well, I am currently working on a C64 game called *Soulless*; think *Impossible Mission* meets *Draconus* and you're about there. It's also getting a Psytronik release. We have a fair few unfinished remakes, which we'll hopefully get back to sometime.

**Stuart:** I've turned my attention to the mobile market – hasn't everyone? I have five projects currently in the works that are almost complete, just waiting on graphics and level design, one being a remake of our popular *Quantasm* for Android and iPhone. We still have to release our horror adventure *Hawksmill* and will eventually get back to *The Final Ninja* and our *Myth* remake. You wouldn't believe how many hits our blog posts on *The Final Ninja* get.









» The original *Armalyte* came in at number 14 in our top 25 Commodore 64 games last issue.

oh, that was the original. I think the part that took the longest was the wave editor and making it friendly enough that Trevor could use it easily. It's nice not having to design an editor for the masses. You can cut corners and not have to spend too much time on the aesthetics.

**RG: How difficult is it re-imagining important graphics like ship designs and enemies?**
**TS:** It was actually pretty easy. The original art has great structure, especially the sprites, which had a good, solid feel to them. I created all the enemies in 3D then rendered them out as a bunch of frames. At first I wasn't too sure how it would look, but thankfully it worked. Once I did a few sprites we made a little demo and sent it to Dan Phillips. He was happy enough so I went from there.

**RG: Is it true that you had to redesign the original artwork?**
**TS:** Yeah, the original box art was by Oli Frey and belonged to him, so I had to redo it. The box art was being used on the C64 re-release too. The original box art was great, so I really enjoyed redoing it with some changes here and there. Hope Oli approves.

**RG: Why did you decide to make this for a disc release as opposed to a download?**
**TS:** Kenz wanted to release it through his software label, Psytronik, so having it in a box seemed natural. It also looks a hell of a lot nicer in a box. And we did some nice little extras too, like a new mix-e-load, jukebox and a few other bits and bobs. We did add a digital download option after a month or two.
**SC:** This was down to the publishers. After a few weeks, though, there was a download version available – and there still is. Personally I still like to have discs on my shelf. Steam is all well and good, but you can't arrange electronic downloads on your shelf now, can you?

**RG: Why did you decide to add achievements to the game?**
**TS:** I just loved how you could unlock Achievements on Xbox games and thought it would add a bit of extra life to the game once it was completed. There's a little extra if you get all the achievements too, but I'm not going to tell you what it is.

**RG: Why have you decided to charge for *Armalyte* when your past remakes have been free?**
**TS:** Well, firstly it's a big game and we knew it would take a lot of work to do. Secondly, the original team deserved something from it for creating such a classic, and thirdly we loved the idea of putting it in a box…

Oh, all right, then. We just wanted to make some money. Seeing as we've released so much for free we thought, 'Let's make a bit of cash out of it.'

**RG: Why are so few new remakes appearing at the moment?**
**TS:** I think we are all getting older and real-life stuff gets in the way of having as much fun – that's what happened to me, anyway. Add to that the fact that the younger gamers aren't getting into it – it's a bit harder remaking first-person shooters.
**SC:** I'm not entirely sure why there aren't as many remakes coming out, but a lot of guys are trying out mobile devices, including us. Being careful of copyright means a remake is not possible, as everyone and their dog are now charging. The usual remakers are definitely quiet, and we don't seem to have any youngsters taking the reins – too busy playing a first-person shooter on a console somewhere.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY…** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

## STAR LETTER

### WE ARE THE MODS

**Dear Retro Gamer,**

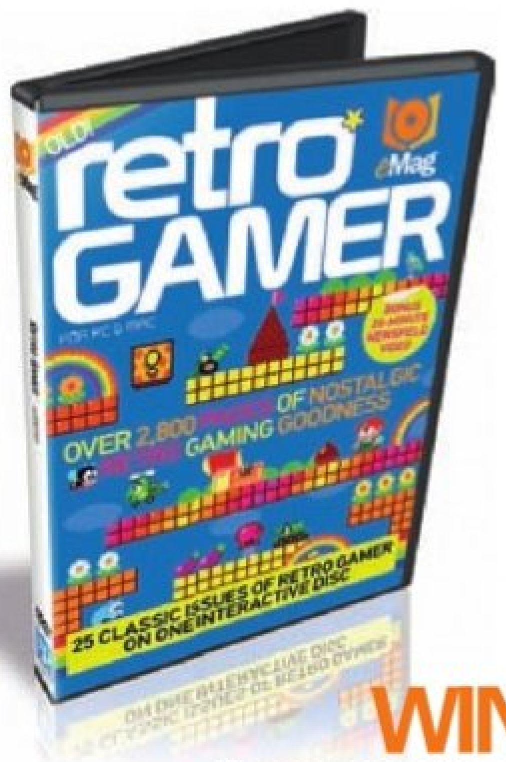
Well done that man, Joe McLeod! A little while ago I wrote in questioning if **Retro Gamer** had run out of ideas, and here is a guy promoting a great idea to go with the other recent additions to this great mag: console DIY. There are many fantastic DIY projects out there to improve the enjoyment of old machines, most making them even more accessible to the modern user. I have composite video mods on my Intellivision and ColecoVision, flash carts for my Vectrex and ColecoVision, a flash card reader for my TI-99/4A, and a C64 and Apple II hooked up to PCs. I find this sort of modding a great side-attraction to my retro gaming that brings another dimension to what I regard as a hobby. There are also great cart cataloguing programs out there, which could also be reviewed. Just when I thought things were dire, I am reminded of the depth of interest there is to be had retro gaming. Keep up the fantastic work; the mag is a great resource and one of the best written around.

Cheers!

Grant Ferey, Australia




**Computer and console modding is certainly a topic we've yet to cover in any great depth. If we decide to run such a feature we'd most likely incorporate it into a broader article that also touches on game and machine preservation, cataloguing and archiving; why it's so greatly important; and the ways and methods that are available to help developers, as well as collectors, safeguard and prolong the life of their games. We'll put the feelers out to our freelancers and see what comes back.**




## WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

### QUASIMODO HEARD IN ROTHERHAM

**Dear Retro Gamer,**

On first glance your Krisalis article rang a very faint bell, but I couldn't work out why from looking at their key games. It was only on a second read through that my brain started to do a proper job. They were based in Rotherham (DING), they worked with EA (DING, DING), they worked on *Premier League Manager* (DING, DING, DING) – I had very briefly worked there in 2001.

I used to be a tester back at good old EA Chertsey, and one of my early projects saw me shipped up to Rotherham for two weeks to help get *Premier League Manager 2002* out the door – the wonders of being on-site. They were a good bunch of chaps in a couple of rooms and I got bundled in with the two artists. They hardly said a thing, instead letting Radio 4 make all the noise. As a young 21-year-old, that was a form of torture. Maybe that's why I don't remember too much about the whole thing; it's my brain's defence mechanism kicking in.

I think one of the art guys would have been Neil Adamson, looking at his photo and assuming he was still there in 2001. The name Tony Kavanagh seems to mean something to me, so I'm thinking he was the dev lead type chap who looked after us while we were up there on our little tester holiday. He used to sit on a funky chair that was meant to be good for posture.




» Reader James Fry worked at Krysalis for a brief spell while working as a tester on *Premier League Manager 2002*. He clearly did a good job, as the following year the series was given to a German developer.

It's a bit sad that I had no idea the company went under that very same year, although I did wonder what happened to them when the following year's *Premier League Manager* was done by a German company. Thanks for giving my brain a big kick up the memory banks. I blame too many computer games.

James Fry

**No problem at all, James. Glad the feature brought back some – we think – good memories of when you were working as a tester and first discovered the delights of Radio 4.**

### POTTY MOUTHS

**Hello Darran,**

Once again thanks for a great magazine, and as we approach number 100 I hope **Retro Gamer** will continue for as long as it remains an interesting and enjoyable read.

I hope we will get to see some more 8-bit coverage, especially with what we call



## CONTACT US

**Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

**Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

## >> YOUTUBE UPDATE



DARRAN SPENT A WEEKEND at the Replay Expo, so he was able to take lots of lovely videos of the exciting event. He's tried to capture a little bit of everything, including a great talk with Team17's John Dennis about the *Worms* franchise. Check it out at www.youtube.com/user/retrogamerdaz

the top three: Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad. How about a regular feature where we see how the 8-bits fared with their arcade conversions? There was such a big difference in performance levels between arcade and home computers. I know you have Coin-Op Capers, which I enjoy, but this could be more in-depth with how the home computers handled the conversions and what cutbacks had to be made. From *Bomb Jack* to *Street Fighter II*, the longer the 8-bits were around, the harder it was for them to keep up. I like to read about the different versions and how they fared, but in more detail. Maybe more coverage on how developers approached these conversions and the difficulties they faced. Some of those guys back then did a great job of getting the most out of 48K. Remember Spectrum *Flying Shark*? Maybe Martyn Carroll can look into this.

Some issues back I was disappointed to come across some bad language in your otherwise fine mag, and I'm sure it must have slipped through the net as it has not happened much, but I see this magazine as a family publication and I hope it doesn't happen again. Even if your interviews contain such content, surely you don't have to print those words. There's already enough poor journalism in magazines these days where that sort of stuff resides and I'm sure you agree that **Retro Gamer** is different.

Earlier this year I asked you about the history of flight simulation in home computing and was wondering if the feature is still going ahead or not. Thanks for taking the time to read. It's feedback from a long-time reader.

Keep up the good work,

Simon Forward, Perth, Australia

**Apologies if any bad language that has found its way into the magazine has offended you, Simon, and anyone else for that matter. If one or two naughty words get into Retro Gamer, it's more than likely come from an interviewee and so unless we feel it out of character or gratuitous, we're relaxed enough to leave it in. That being said, it's a very good point you raise; we wouldn't want Retro Gamer to be a magazine you think twice about letting your children leaf through, therefore we might start being a little more mindful of it in future issues. Answering your other points, we currently have no plan to introduce an in-depth conversion comparison feature, but the flight sim retrospective is certainly going ahead.**

### US HOORAY!

I just wanted to let you know that you have one amazing magazine. We don't have a magazine anywhere close to this in the US. **Retro Gamer** and *Mad* magazine are now my two favourites. Thank you also for the special US pricing. It's helped me afford a subscription. Keep up the great work and know you have a loyal subscriber for life.

Dennis Glatz II, Lansing, MI USA

**Welcome to Retro Gamer, Dennis. Always great to hear that we've picked up a new subscriber, and we're really pleased that our new US pricing is making the magazine seem more attractive to American readers. We appreciate that RG isn't the cheapest gaming magazine on newsstands over there, but we always try our utmost to ensure that the content justifies a purchase.** >>

"As a young 21-year-old, listening to Radio 4 was a form of torture"

## RETROBATE PROFILE



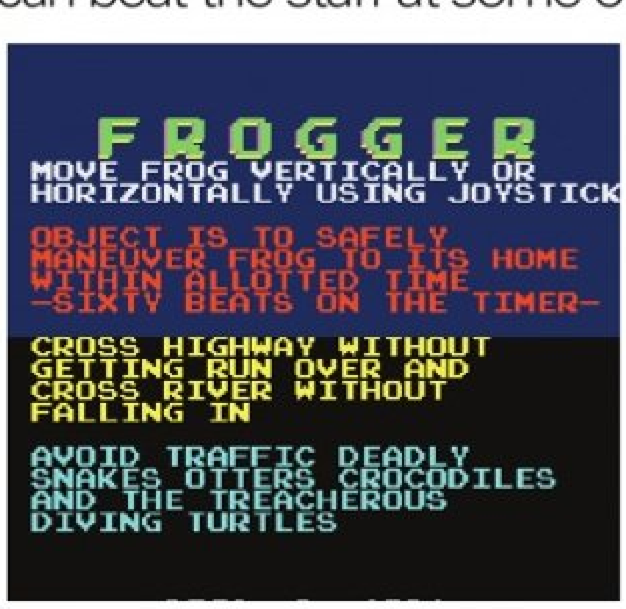
| | |
|---|---|
| Name: | James Monkman |
| Joined: | 7 Nov 2011 |
| Location: | Exeter, UK |
| Occupation: | Not given |
| Website: | www.rgcd.co.uk |
| Fave Games System: | Not given |




>> [Apple II] Simon Forward wants us to take a look at the history of flight simulators. Here's the first part.

# * BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles




### FROGGER

**This month we'd like all our readers to take part and play the arcade version of Konami's *Frogger*. Email us your high score (with a photo or screenshot for proof) and the winner will be highlighted next issue. If you need some hints, simply look to the right.**




High Score: 10,060




High Score: 15,900



### DARRAN'S FROGGER TIPS

**The thing to** remember about *Frogger* is that it's all about timing and precision. If you want additional points, though, remember that you'll earn an additional 200 points for transporting Frogger's girl home, and a further 200 for landing on a fly. And yes, my high score is pathetic.



### STUART'S FROGGER TIPS

**As Darran said,** *Frogger* is all about good judgement and timing; rushing through it is a recipe for instant French cuisine. Other than that, I'd say be wary of that tricky fourth lane of traffic, and try to get an early frog to the home at the far left if you can, as it's the trickiest to reach.

# From the forum

## » To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

## What was your favourite free covertape/disk?

**rossi46**
*CU Amiga* gave away *Doom* levels and my A1200 with lowly spec played it with a frame rate marginally better than a slide show and with postage stamp resolution, but I was in heaven. Great days.

**joefish**
*Batty*, for the ZX Spectrum, from *Your Sinclair*. The most playable *Arkanoid* clone there's ever been, and all given away for free. Two-player mode was a masterstroke.

**thevulture**
Tape: *Operation Wolf* demo. Cannot recall which magazine it was on now, think it was *Zzap!64*. Played that to death before purchasing it on C64. Disk: *Zero* had an exclusive *Lords Of Chaos* level for ST/Amiga.

**Jagfest_UK**
I am very tempted to say *Batty* as that was brilliant and another one that comes close is *A Whole New Ball Game* that came free on a *Crash* tape, but the one I actually spent the most time with was a really good footy manager game that came free with *ST Action*. It was called *The Manager* – great original title there – and me and my best mate spent hours upon hours playing it.

**DreamcastRIP**
Another vote for *Batty*. One of the best ever Speccy games, and it was free!

**Smurph**
Not a game as such, but the *Official PlayStation Mag* gave away demo discs that had rather awesome music visualisers on them. Game-wise it would have to be *Batty*, which was even better than *Arkanoid* on the Speccy.

**Mayhem**
*Commodore Force* gave away some pretty heavy-hitting games in its last issues, such as *World Games* and *Impossible Mission 2*, so it's probably one of those. Didn't have a 16-bit machine, so I can't comment on 3.5" disks, but if you can label *Golden Disk* as essentially having 'cover disks', then I'd certainly mention *Enforcer* as the best thing to get offered as part of that.

**Bub&Bob**
The *Zzap* Sampler from issue 26 – *Last Ninja* was my very first 'wow' moment when I saw the first screen render, which may have been one of the first tapes on the cover.

**ipmarks**
*Amstrad PC User* had a free 5.25" floppy on the cover, and they gave away an excellent *Space Wars* DOS clone that I played more than any other PC game. If only I could remember its name I could download it, and it would also have made this post more interesting.

**themightymartin**
*PC Zone* once did a CD that featured the shareware version of *Doom* along with about ten *Doom* clones, as people called them at the time. It included some real classics such as *Rise Of The Triad*, the original *System Shock*, *Dark Forces* and… *Operation Bodycount*.

**jdanddiet**
One word: *Chaos*. Hours and hours of my life, and then *Rebelstar 2* too! A note of caution, however, on these claims of 'free' – certainly during the 8-bit era the mags tended to subtly raise the price.

**Rory Milne**
Given the time of year, I'll have to go for Sonic Team's *Christmas NiGHTS*, which was given away with one December issue of *Sega Saturn Magazine*.

**rapidly-greying**
*Your Sinclair* gave away the theme music to the arcade version of *After Burner*, awesome tune! *Batty* and *Xmas Monty* get very honourable mentions too. *Official PlayStation Magazine* gave away a disc of Net Yaroze games once. It featured a decent *Sensible Soccer* clone that achieved legendary status in my eyes due to having some tremendous comedy names. Jimmy Floyd Hooslebonk springs to mind. Genius.

**Matt_B**
I can remember a game called *unSensible Soccer*, given away with the Easter 1993 edition of *ST Action* that let you play a game of apples versus oranges. These replaced the normal footballer graphics. There were also banana skins strewn about the pitch and you'd fall over if you slipped on one.

**yethboth**
I would have to say *Shuriken* on the ZX Spectrum was my favourite covertape game. An *Exolon* clone and a very good one. It was made by a Speccy fan for Speccy fans and was given away free on the Dec 1990 issue of *Crash* magazine as one of the covertape games.

**thingonaspring**
I really enjoyed *Sensitive* on the C64 – think I read that it shouldn't actually have been given away – and *Drip!* on the Amiga. Timeless classic…

**IronMaidenRule**
I am going to go for the demo disc that was on an issue of *Official PlayStation Magazine*. It had an exclusive demo of *ISS '98* that me and my mate played to death until the game came out. One half of France vs Brazil… heavenly!

## YOUR OPINION PLEASE

### THINGS YOU HATE IN GAMES YOU LOVE

**DreamcastRIP** *OutRun Online Arcade*. My favourite current-gen game by a country mile… but no bugger is ever online to race against these days. Grrrr!

**greenberet79** *Hot Shots Tennis* (PSP) – a quite brilliant game of tennis, but why oh why do I have to spend 75 per cent of my time running around parks?

**NintendoLegend** *StarTropics* on the NES may be my favourite game of all time. But not only is it a game I love with an element I hate, but that element is something I also admire it for, despite my hatred. It's the moment when you need to input a password… and it's given by dipping the manual in water to reveal it.

### BRITAIN'S GREATEST ACTOR

**Sputryk** Peter O'Toole. Disgracefully robbed of a richly deserved Oscar for Best Actor in *Lawrence Of Arabia*. Although he has been awarded an honorary Oscar, one can only hope he wins outright before he takes a rest.

**TwoHeadedBoy** Alan Rickman plays more or less the same character in every film, but WHAT a character!

**IronMaidenRule** Rik Mayall. Not an actor in the traditional sense, but all of his characters are great and memorable… just like him.

**Scapegoat** As far as best living actors, I'd say it's a toss-up between Oldman and Roth (see *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* for a fantastic performance from both) and best ever would be Guinness.

### THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

**ShadowMan** I can't wait to get it. I won't buy it straight away but as my PC should be able to run it on high settings I'll grab it for the PC. I spent 260-odd hours on *Oblivion* so I can see me wasting a lot of time on *Skyrim*.

**killbot** I'd be very excited if I thought my PC would run it. I currently have the first four *TES* games on my PC, although for some reason I've started with *Oblivion*, which I'm enjoying. Will it be significantly different to *Oblivion*? Well, visually it looks different – everything seems very Nordic in design, like Bruma in Cyrodiil.

**Garry** I hope it's more like *Morrowind*, and doesn't have you hopping across the map from one marker to the other. A bit harder and rewarding, which I don't think *Oblivion* was. Still a good game, but I will be getting this.

## OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Sonic* game is the best?

Sonic The Hedgehog



Sonic Generations



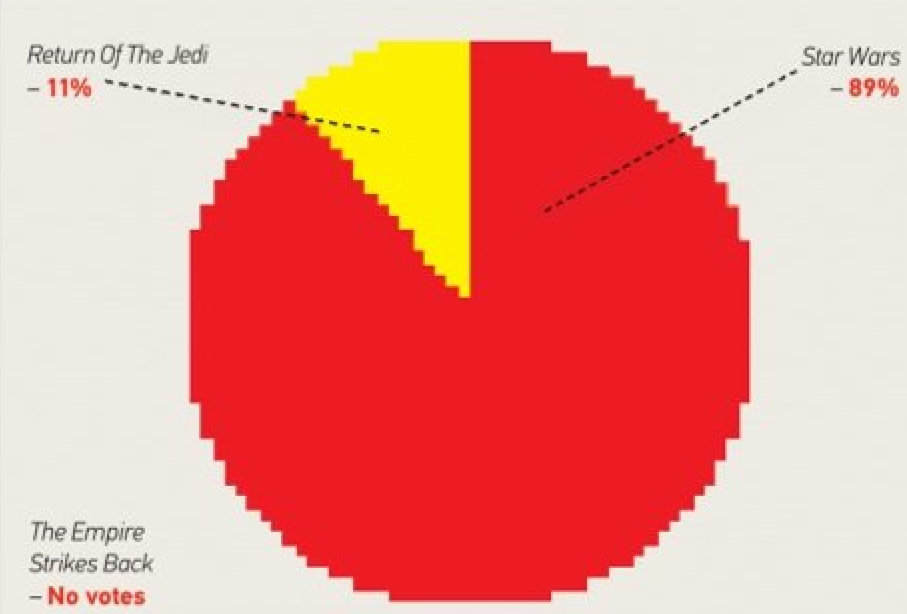
82% | 18%

**bounty bob**
Loved the original and love *Generations*. Why not a voting option for both?

**DigitalDuck**
The original is fantastic, but *Generations* is even better.

## HOT TOPIC

### Best Super Star Wars game




"*Super Star Wars* was excellent and I played it for weeks… never finished it, though. By *Empire* and *Jedi* they had become stupidly hard and the magic had gone, so *Super Star Wars* for me"
**– ipmarks**

"First one has the best gameplay, and the others were far too hard"
**– Skull Commander**

## WRESTLE WAR

**Dear RG,**

I wanted to see which was the toughest between an Archimedes, TRS-80 model III and Spectrum, so I sticky taped some arms and legs onto each of them and then attached plastic swords into their hands and then it was on. I put my Darth Vader helmet on and proceeded to orchestrate WWE moves on each of them, and a few I'd seen at UFC 137, and it wasn't long before the Spectrum blew up, or at least its little rubber keys and bits were strewn all about the room and so it was considered dead and vanquished to the scrap metal stockpile. The Archimedes put up a fight and battled valiantly but did sustain some internal haemorrhaging with some chips dismantled or crushed and its disk drive all but battered more or less like a victim in a bad case of domestic violence. The TRS-80, though, was totally unharmed and even unmarked and therefore deemed the winner because that thing could withstand a hurricane or cyclone and is built like a tank.

Yours truly,

Thomas Bartolo, B Ward, Sunshine Hospital

**Wow. What an extremely bizarre story. Just to clarify, you taped some arms and legs on an Archimedes, TRS-80 and Spectrum, and then wrestled with them to see which could sustain the most punishment. After which you came to the conclusion that a Spectrum is about as tough as an 80-year-old daisy? We really, REALLY hope your psychiatrist reads Retro Gamer.**

> "Which was the toughest between an Archimedes, TRS-80 and Spectrum?"

### DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

**There can be only five**

**Darran's been writing an article on *Highlander* for *SciFiNow*. He's got every one of the movies and been regaling Stuart and Kate with examples of how much of a mess they are. To explain, here's a quote from the second film: "You come from another planet, and you're mortal there, but you're immortal here until you kill all the guys from there who have come here… and then you're mortal here… unless you go back there, or some more guys from there came here, in which case you become immortal here… again."**

## FULL CIRCLE

**Dear Retro Gamer**

I read with interest and fond memories last month's article on Teque/Krisalis. Having worked there for 12 years, it was great to see screenshots of the games over the six pages. The only thing I found a bit of a letdown was the interviews with the employees. Some of the key people were not even mentioned; Mark Edwards was the first artist to work there. I joined in 1989 from Rare. As for the where are they now, a majority, including myself and Mark Edwards, have come full circle as it were and are working for Sumo Digital, as they started out as Gremlin where the founding members Tony, Pete and Shaun came from. There are, in fact, seven ex-Krisalis employees working at Sumo Digital. I work with a talented bunch of people, who all have years of gaming experience. One of the lads actually played *Arabian Nights* with his brother when they were kids, so I'm showing my age. It was great fun working there and we often talk about it when we have coffee/tea breaks.

Cheers,

Mark Potente

**Thanks for your email, Mark. Michael did manage to track down and speak to quite a few former employees, but of course trying to condense an entire company history into just a few pages in a magazine isn't easy. As such, invariably information and names can sometimes get left out of the tale. Glad to hear that you had an enjoyable time working there, though, and that the article brought back some fond memories for you.**

KRISALIS SOFTWARE LTD.

» Last month's Teque/Krisalis feature seems to have reignited fond memories this month from two people with ties to the company.

## CURRENTLY PLAYING






**DARRAN**
**Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception**
Yes, it's more of *Uncharted 2*, but to me that's no bad thing. Cinematically, it pushes the medium further than any other game, and it remains the best-looking game on any current console.






**STUART**
**Dark Souls**
*Demon's Souls* completely passed me by, but after hearing so many good things about it I decided I would check out the sequel. I am slowly inching my way through its vast, masochistic world. Hugely rewarding.






**DAVID**
**Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception**
After months of scouring magazines and websites for titbits, I've been able to take on my role as a latter day Indiana Jones once more in a game that's even better than the second instalment.

**retro GAMER**

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
**Web:** www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

**Magazine team**

Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Rick Porter**
Designer **Kate Logsdon**
Features Editor **Stuart Hunt**
Senior Sub Editor **Mat Hoddy**
Sub Editor **Olly Dean**
Senior Art Editor **Greg Whitaker**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

**Contributors**
Mike Bevan, Jerry Booner, Richard Burton, Martyn Carroll, Paul Davies, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, Jason Kelk, Iain Lee, Ian Marks, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Anne-Claire Pickard, Samuel Roberts, John Szczepaniak

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Oliver Frey

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**Advertising**
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
**Advertising Director** James Willmott
☎ 01202 586432
james.willmott@imagine-publishing.co.uk
**Head of Sales** Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
**Advertising Sales Executive** Daniel Peat
☎ 01202 586424
daniel.peat@imagine-publishing.co.uk

**International**
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
**Head of International Licensing** Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

**Subscriptions**
**Head of Subscriptions** Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ (UK) 0844 848 8412
☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
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**Circulation**
**Head of Circulation** Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

**Production**
**Production Director** Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

**Founders**
**Group Managing Director** Damian Butt
**Group Finance & Commercial Director** Steven Boyd
**Group Creative Director** Mark Kendrick

**Printing & Distribution**
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☎ +61 2 9972 8800

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☎ 0203 148 8105

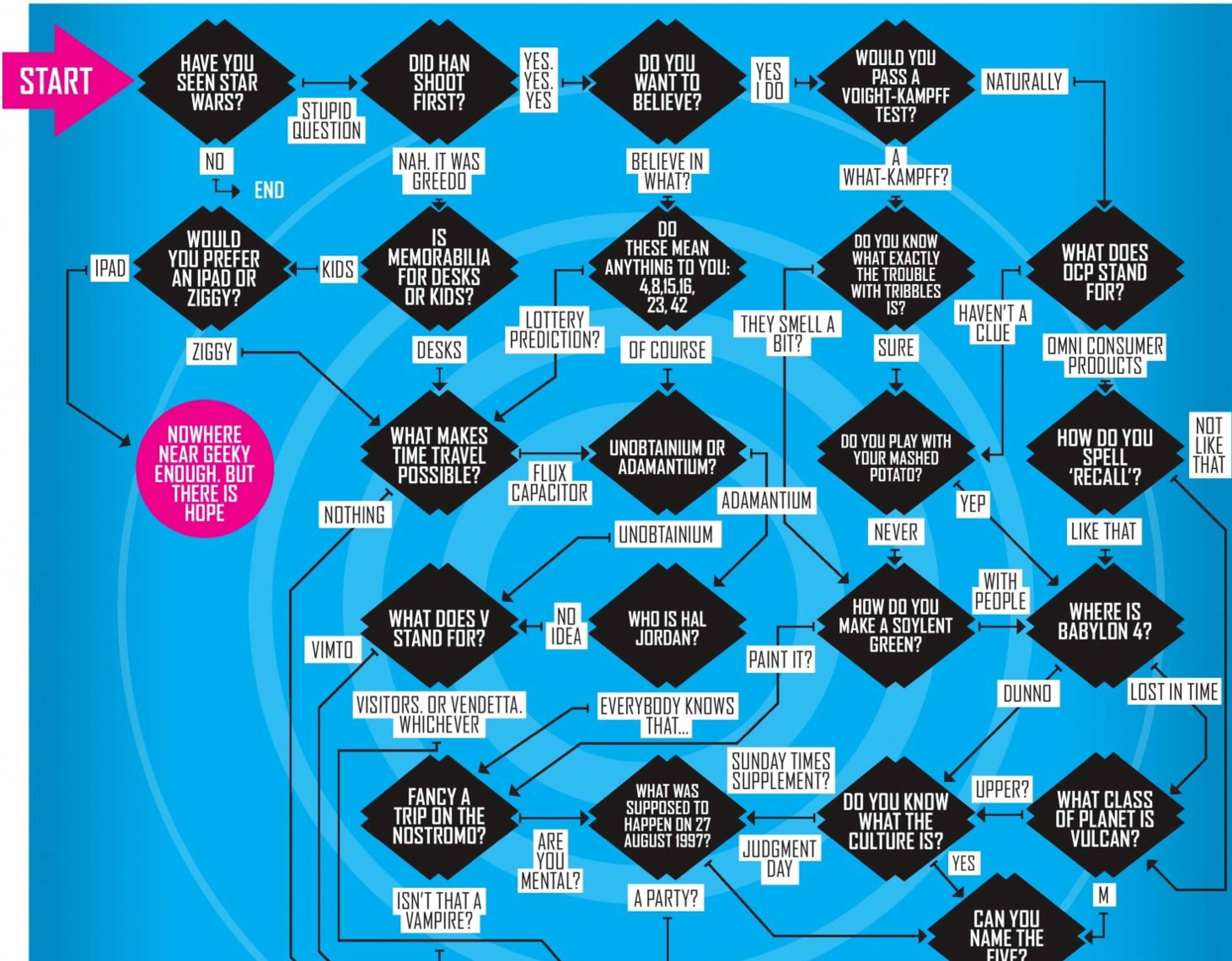
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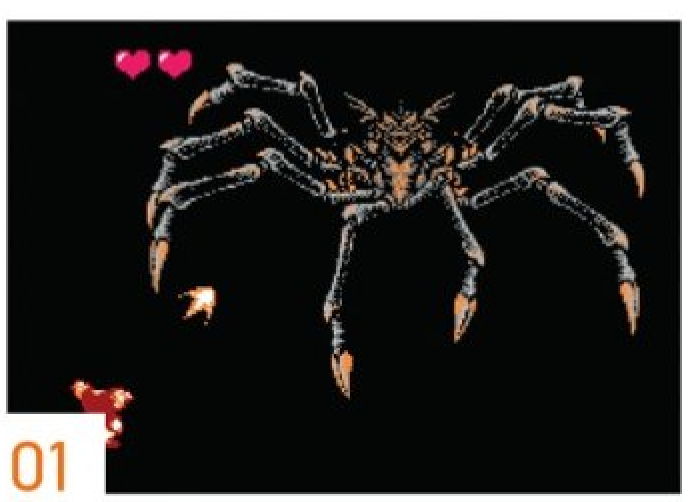

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# ENDGAME




## GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

» *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* was an overhead puzzle/shooter in which players assumed the role of cuddly Mogwai Gizmo in *Die Hard* mode. Stuck in an office building, he had to traverse its floors and lay waste to his badly behaved offspring after they had transformed into green, scaly destructive little monsters and threatened the life of best mate Billy Peltzer…



01

» The final fight sees Gizmo face off against Mohawk, who transforms into this ugly brute here. Gizmo might be small, but David toppled Goliath, so Gizmo can topple this giant Gremlin-minotaur-spider beast. It's kind of the same thing.



02

» As the fight rages on, the other Gremlins throw a victory party downstairs in the main lobby of the building. The shindig is in full swing. If they're not careful though, they're going to be nursing some ugly sore heads come morning.



03

» A quick-thinking Billy realises that he might be able to summon the electric Gremlin that he managed to trap inside the building's phone line as a way to end the festivities. He holds the phone out and presses the transfer button.



04

» A bolt of electricity is blasted from the phone receiver and somehow turns a perfect right angle to fall vertically. The Gremlins are so preoccupied in slurred conversation and heavy drinking that they fail to notice the bolt of electric Gremlin death.



05

» Zap! The Gremlins are turned into piles of putrid earwax. With Billy and Gizmo left to clean up the mess, they grab some cotton wool buds and a pressure washer and start scrubbing the building clean. The next morning, Billy euthenised Gizmo.



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